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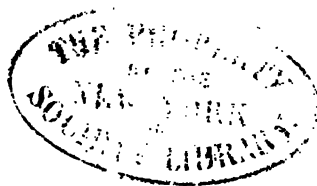
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JANET'S HOME.

CHAPTER I.

"There is no friend like a sister,
In calm or stormy weather,
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

I CAN remember, as well as if it were yesterday, the precise moment in my mental life when my self-consciousness was awakened into the overweening activity which has caused me so much trouble and so many mortifications ever since. How often I have tried to send it to sleep again! How many sops, in the shape of sermons on single-mindedness, poems on the beauty of simplicity, philosophical dissertations, have I not administered to my Cerberus, and how complacently it has swallowed and fattened upon them all. I am, perhaps, giving the largest now, by writing out my recollections of my life, but it is in the confident hope that a full meal may make the hungry, lean, clamorous creature quiet at last. Surely, when I have turned myself inside out, and put myself away in the leaves of a note-book, I shall have done with the subject.

Well, I will begin with that day when I first turned my attention from the outside world to that within, and contemplated my individual I, as the Germans would say.

I was reading the other day, in Jean Paul's life, how he, a poet-child, stood one evening at the door of his father's cottage, looking out on broad, solitary fields, bright with their first winter garment of new snow, and listening to the

wind sweeping through the pine-forests behind his house ; and how, in that hour, a new thought was borne into his mind, filling it with I know not what sensations of reverence and joy :—"I am an *I*." Not being a poet, I do not understand why he felt so pleased with the discovery, and certainly *my* self-consciousness came to me in a much more commonplace and feminine fashion. I was between eight and nine years old, it was the autumn of the year—the late part of the autumn—a disagreeable season in our house, when the weather (in our father's opinion) was not cold enough to call for fires in the sitting-rooms, but was (in reality) quite cold enough to cause us children to walk about the house with pinched faces and shivering arms. The light, too, to my thinking, failed at an inconvenient hour, not early enough to make it worth while (in my mother's opinion) to light the lamps before tea, and yet in time to leave a long, dreary blind man's holiday, which, to a restless child like myself, was particularly irksome.

On the day I am thinking of, I left my little sister alone in the nursery, and slipped down to the drawing-room, where, owing to the larger size of the windows, daylight lingered for a quarter of an hour longer. I was in the most exciting part of "*Evelina*"—a volume I had stolen from my mother's dressing-room—and I held the book close to the window-pane, and strained my eyes till they grew dim before I could bring myself to leave off reading. When, at last, no word could be spelt out, I sat down on the carpet, under the shade of the curtains, and amused myself by contemplating the fantastic pictures which my rapid reading had left on my mind. Very fantastic pictures they were for, of course, I only understood a third of the book ; but looking back upon them, I began (for the first time in my life) to try to draw some conclusion from what I had been reading. I thought over the strange actions and sayings of the people whose society I had just left, and made an effort to reconcile them with the manners and opinions of the people among whom I lived. Before long, amid much confusion, one point of difference grew very clear to me—I discovered that my book taught that there was another way of dividing the inhabitants of the world beside that old one of bad and good to which I had been accustomed. Men and women were not only bad or good, they were also beautiful or ugly ; and this

distinction, when I had once admitted it, struck me as admitting a breadth of separation to which it was strange I could so long have been blind. To be beautiful was clearly to be happy, admirable, glorious; to be ugly was not exactly a disgrace—my conscience would not let me think that—but something extremely undesirable and inglorious; something that a person, somehow or other, ought not to be. I had not thought about myself so far, but I think I must have been on the verge of it, when my attention was called from my own reflections by hearing my name spoken; and peeping through the curtain, I discovered that my mother, and a neighbour who sometimes came to spend the evening with her, had entered the drawing-room during my reverie, and were talking together.

"Yes," I heard my mother say, "you are quite right; I am very uneasy about the way in which Janet's teeth are coming. If she had had the best teeth in the world, her mouth would still have looked too large. As it is, I dread to think how she will look."

"Oh, perhaps her teeth will improve," I heard good-natured Mrs. Wilton answer. "Janet is just now at an ugly age; one cannot, at nine years old, say how a girl will look when she is grown up."

There was a pause, and then my mother sighed. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Wilton, I know quite well how Janet will look when she is grown up. I am not one of those mothers who cannot see their children's imperfections; my anxiety makes me keen-sighted. I see clearly enough that Janet can never be otherwise than very plain; she has not one good feature in her face except her eyes, and her complexion is hopeless."

"You call it so, because your other children have such beautiful complexions. How exquisitely fair Ernestine is! how lovely she promises to be!—and Charlie, I do think, is the handsomest boy I ever saw in my life."

"Charlie is very well, and Ernestine will, I suppose, be pretty; that makes me the more sorry about Janet. When there are only two sisters, it is a pity they should be so unlike. I shall never know how to dress them."

"Janet is like Hilary."

"Oh, no!" cried my mother; "Hilary's face is far better featured; and besides, in a boy it does not signify."

"No; and after all, dear Mrs. Scott" (I noticed here a

change in the voice—more gravity, and less sincerity in its tone)—“after all, what does it signify for any one? ‘Vanity of vanities,’ you know.”

“Yes—yes, of course—of course,” my mother interrupted, rather sharply. “I intend to bring up both Janet and Ernestine to think nothing about appearance. I shall tell them, if ever I speak on the subject at all, that it is not of the *slightest* consequence whether they are pretty or plain. But still, I must confess it is a mortification to me that Janet should not be a little better-looking; and I am very sorry that Mr. Scott set his face so decidedly against my taking her to a dentist about her teeth six months ago. Unhappily, you see, Mr. Scott has peculiar theories.”

At this point of the conversation, I covered my ears with my hands, and honestly tried not to listen further; even at nine years old I did not like the tone in which my dear mother would sometimes speak of my dear father’s “theories;” and, besides, I had more than enough to think about. I was not, at first, either hurt or humbled by the information I had so suddenly received about myself; the prominent feeling was wonder, that I, Janet Scott, should have been made a subject of conversation between two grown-up people; that I should be recognised at all, except as “one of the children.” I was surprised that Mrs. Wilton should have noticed whether my teeth were growing straight or crooked, that my mother should be distressed about it, and, above all, that my father should have troubled himself to “set his face” against a purpose that only concerned me. I think, now, that it speaks well for my education that I had reached the age of nine in such desirable unconsciousness of my importance to my elders; that one overheard conversation destroyed all the advantage I might have derived from the extra care with which, as I now know, my father’s wisdom surrounded us.

I sat and thought, at first a little elate and consequential; but by degrees a painful feeling of loneliness stole over me. It was true that people talked about me, and thought of me, but then it was to find fault. I had been singled out from the family group, but then it was to be judged for deficiencies which the others did not share. The thought brought with it a painful sullen sense of separation. I felt glad that the curtain hid me from general observation; I hoped that my

brothers and sister would not come to look for me ; I wished that they might all forget me, and that I might have to sit in the cold, supperless, till bed-time.

From this evil mood I was delivered at last by my eldest brother Hilary. I had heard him enter the house, and run up into the nursery, and then down to the library, to look for me, with a sullen resolve not to stir ; but when at last he tracked me to my hiding-place, and I caught sight of his good-humoured face cautiously insinuated between the curtains, I could resist no longer.

"Did not you know that I had come home?" he said, when he had lured me from the drawing-room. "What could make you hide from me? Such waste of time. Come and feed the fish in the garret before the bell rings for tea."

The proposition softened my ill-humour for a time ; I was proud of being the only person whom Hilary ever invited to accompany him to a certain lumber-room at the top of the house, where my mother allowed him to keep some pet fish and various other nondescript treasures. How well I can picture the oddly-shaped room as it looked that evening, while the rays of Hilary's dim candle were struggling to drive back the darkness from the middle of the room to the awful corners where day and night it lingered. Those corners were the veritable home of darkness to me. On long winter afternoons, when Hilary and I were alone in the garret, I used to watch the thing, rising from its lurking-place, creeping closer to me, till I felt it on my face, and then stealing downstairs, creeping lower and lower, till it filled the house. I could not have borne this if I had been quite alone, but there was something in Hilary's presence that sent nervous fears to sleep ; whenever my fancies, Frankenstein-like, rose up against me, to terrify me with the fearfulness I had given them, I had only to move a little nearer Hilary, or to look across the room at his sensit'le, strong face, to feel perfectly safe. We often spent long afternoons in the garret together, Hilary and I. I had always at hand a secret store of books, taken at random from my father's library, which I read greedily, with or without understanding, as the case might be. Hilary had pursuits of his own quite as absorbing. The favourite one was tending a colony of sticklebacks and tadpoles, which he kept in an old water-butt. Looking up from my book, I was sometimes surprised

to see how long he would stand upright, with his hands before him, staring down into the stagnant dark-coloured water, and how eager and intent his eyes grew every now and then.

"What are you seeing?" I used to ask impatiently, sometimes.

"Come and look yourself," he would answer; for Hilary, unlike the rest of the family, was sparing of words. When I looked, however, I could never see anything but green slimy stones, and long, thin leaves of water-weeds, stirred languidly by the transit of a small fish or the evolutions of some shapeless monster, all head or all tail, that I could hardly look at without disgust.

But I am wandering far from the events of that evening. I remained tolerably happy while I fed Hilary's fish. I knew there was no possibility of making him understand the nature of my discontent, therefore I put it aside while I was in his company, and took it up again when I returned to the nursery, and found myself left alone with my younger sister Ernestine. She had suffered from some childish illness and was slowly recovering from it. She was always a delicate child, and was often, for weeks together, unable to share the rather hardy way of life my father prescribed for us elder ones. I sometimes came in for a share of her privileges. The one I valued most was being allowed to spend the evening with her in the comfortable nursery, instead of having to go down to the dining-room and learn my lessons in company with my brothers, under my father's strict eye. Ernestine had begged this indulgence for me on that evening, and was waiting tea for me when I returned from the garret. Two white cups and plates stood on the nursery table, and on each of them Nesta had placed an equal portion of the good things my mother had provided to tempt her delicate appetite. I was in a very perverse mood, for the sight of this preparation for my comfort vexed, instead of pleased me. I wanted an excuse for feeling angry with Ernestine, whom I had heard praised at my expense, and I did not like to have to be obliged to her. I refused to taste any of her proffered dainties, telling her that they were *hers*, and not *mine*; and insisted on eating nothing but the basin of bread-and-milk the servant had brought up, as a matter of course, for my supper. It was very cruel of me; I knew quite well

that by doing so I was taking the sweetness from every morsel that Ernestine tasted. She soon left off eating, and sat looking wistfully at me, as I plodded through my basin of milk, and turned over the pages of "Evelina." After tea, as I still sat sulkily silent, she crouched down on the rug at my feet, and satisfied herself by lifting up her hand and every now and then softly stroking mine. Though not much more than a year younger than I was, she was a very much smaller child, and she had always hung upon me with that sort of absorbed love which one often sees a delicate younger child bestow on a stronger elder one. The servants, and even my mother, used to say that it was a pity that Ernestine was so silly about Janet. I remember, when she could just speak plain, she was trotting after me somewhere, and she suddenly looked up and said, with an air of one who has made a great discovery, "Janet, you and I are two 'each others.'" I cannot see any meaning in the phrase now, but I did then, with the comment that Ernestine's brown eyes put upon it; and I partly understood the satisfaction she had in repeating it constantly. It was a sort of creed with her for years. I did my best to shake her faith in it that night. Tired of being silent, at last, she timidly touched my hand and said, "Janet, please speak to me."

I was by this time not disinclined to talk out the thought that oppressed my mind. "I have something to tell you, Nesta," I said. "I don't mean to have you for my friend any more. I mean to have Hilary for my friend, and Charlie shall be yours."

"Oh, Janet, why?"

"Because friends should be alike, and I am like Hilary."

"But I will choose to be like you."

"You cannot choose," I said, solemnly. "I have heard all about it from mamma. You are very pretty, and I am very ugly. I know, though you don't, what a difference that makes."

"Tell me what difference."

I was puzzled, among all the half-formed notions I had gathered from "Evelina," to find one that I could put into words. I pondered a little, and then I began to describe to Nesta how this difference would probably affect us when we were both grown up—how every one would admire and love her because she was beautiful, and give her splendid presents

and take her to wonderful places ; and how I should have to stay at home, and be of no account at all, because I was ugly. I grew interested in the picture I was drawing, as I went on ; and as I took care to represent myself in a sufficiently injured and interesting light, I began to think I should not so much dislike my position in it after all. Nesta sat looking up at me with her believing eyes ; when I had finished I was rather frightened to see that her little face had grown pale, and that there was an expression of pain on it.

"Oh, Janet, how dreadful !" she said. "I don't think I shall be able to bear it."

"Bear what ? Don't you see that you are to be very happy, and have all sorts of nice things ?"

"I—by myself ? But, Janet, I *cannot* have anything that you have not : please don't say that I must. Don't make it out so. Let it be as it used to be—that we are two each others."

"But that is nonsense, Nesta," I said. "You are *yourself*, and I am *myself*—you *must* learn to understand that—you ought to be glad. Don't you think it is nice to be pretty ?"

"No ; not unless you are prettier. I would ask people to like you best ; but you seem to think they would not. It would be very sad for me. I don't know what I should do."

I began to think that there was a still greater contrast between Nesta and myself than the external one to which my mother had opened my eyes. I was ashamed of my own selfish humour, and sorry that I had troubled my poor little sister with it.

"Well, we won't think any more about it now, Nesta," I said. "You shall sit on my knee, and I will tell you all about Evelina and the Broughtons."

The rest of the evening passed in our usual interminable talk, but the wistful expression did not leave Nesta's face ; and in the middle of the night I was awakened by the sound of her sobbing.

"What is the matter, Nesta ?" I asked.

"Oh, Janet, I have had such a dreadful dream. I thought I was in a beautiful place, and that you were not there ; I was looking for you, and calling you, and you would not come."

"It was only a dream," I said.

"I know that ; but, Janet, will you say that you don't *really* think that I ever need have anything that you have not ?"

I soothed her to sleep again, and resolved to be more careful what I said to her for the future. I had sense enough to know that Nesta was not a child to whom a fit of crying did no injury ; she was far too fragile to have one without suffering for it afterwards. I think I began to be careful over Nesta from that evening.

The contrast in our looks, which might possibly have been a cause of division, became, from that time, a new bond of union. I could not be jealous of the admiration Nesta's beauty excited, when I saw as I did how every word of praise pained her, unless she could persuade herself that it applied equally to me. I knew that she would gladly have taken off her beauty like a garment, and clothed me with it if she could. If we could have had that, as we had every other possession, "between us," she would have valued it ; without that possibility, it was a burden to her.

CHAPTER II.

*"In des Herzens heilig stille Räume
Mußt du fliehen aus des Lebens Drang ;
Freiheit ist nur in dem Reich der Träume."*

SCHILLER.

I FANCY that I was not allowed to spend my evenings so frequently with Nesta in the nursery after I was nine years old, for I remember fewer and fewer such occasions as time passed on ; and yet, in looking back on my childhood, it is still the evenings that I remember vividly. It almost seems to me as if, in our old home, it was always evening.

My father was the head-master of B—— School, where my brothers were pupils. He was also professor of history at one of the London colleges ; and the duties consequent on his position were so engrossing, that, during the greater part of every day, and for three evenings of each week, Nesta and I hardly saw him. Even when he was in the

house, it was not his habit to address many words to any of us children, or to appear as if he were in any way occupied with our proceedings; and yet he was, more emphatically than any other person I ever saw, "the head of his house"—the one who occupied the chief place in the thoughts of every dweller in it, and who gave the character to the life lived there.

The evenings he spent at home were very quiet ones. We sat in the dining-room, for there was no table in the drawing-room large enough to hold the number of books which my father collected round him while he was preparing his lecture for the next evening. He had the lamp and two candles in front of him, for his sight was never good. My mother and we children sat at the opposite end of the table, where our occupations could be carried on without interfering with his. My dear mother, not having such keen eyes as we had, nor the heart to commit such an extravagance as that of burning *more* than two candles, was obliged to restrict her employments to winding skeins of silk or cotton, rolling tape into balls, or unravelling the string and smoothing out, for future use, the paper in which parcels had been packed. How I wondered at the patience which sustained her over these tasks evening after evening. I used to sit just opposite my father, and the work with which I was supposed to be occupying myself used to fall on my lap many times and stay there, so interested used I to be in watching him. I fancied that I could trace the progress of what he was reading in his face. He sat very upright, his head slightly bent towards his book; the strong light from the lamp fell on his high broad forehead, from which the dark hair was much worn; his eyebrows were usually slightly knit; the lips pressed in; the rest of the features and figure in perfect repose, while the restless eyes glanced rapidly to and fro on the page with a sort of fierce eagerness in them, as if they would tear the heart out of the book. Sometimes—once perhaps in an evening, or not so often—the lips relaxed their pressure, and a slight smile curved their edges, the brows unknit, the eyes rested on a line, or were raised from the book, and I knew by the light in them that my father had read something that had pleased him. In the midst of dry details he had come upon the record of some noble word or deed that thrilled to his heart. Sometimes I have seen him moved so far as to get up from

his seat and walk with rapid sounding steps up and down the room, his head erect, his mouth working. He was not with us at these seasons, I knew that well enough. I had a dim idea of the ages of distance that separated his spirit from us and our concerns ; but I longed for courage to go up to him and tell him how I sympathized with him, and longed to be allowed to admire what he admired and love what he loved.

There were evenings, however, when the study of history (judging its pleasures by my father's face) did not present itself to me under so inviting an aspect. Then the leaves of the books were flitted backwards and forwards with a sharp, impatient sound ; my father's brows were knitted tighter as the evening passed on ; he fidgetted every now and then in his chair, and I knew he had fallen upon evil times—that his work was a task, and that, instead of being absorbed by it, he was nervously alive to every sound and motion in the room. The fairy Fine-ear, who could hear the grass grow, had not keener senses than my father when he was engaged in writing on a subject, or describing a character, that was distasteful to him. He used to look up at us, if we stirred or whispered, with an expression in his eyes something like that seen in those of a tortured animal. He seldom spoke, and, when he did it was not to administer a sharp rebuke, which, perhaps, we should not have greatly heeded, but to address some carefully-worded sentence to the delinquent in a tone that awed us to the bottom of our hearts. "Hilary, my boy," he would say, "if swinging that ruler up and down does not materially assist you in learning your problem, I shall be obliged to you if you will put it away ;" or, "Janet, are there any needles in the world that don't make that incessant click-click in going through the work ? If there are, I would give a great deal for you to have them ;" or rarely, on very bad evenings, he used to look across the table towards my mother, and observe, in his coldest voice, "My dear Ernestine, some day, when you are quite at leisure, I shall be obliged to you if you will make a calculation of how much you economize in a year by preserving those pieces of string and the papers you are straightening out. I think you will find it hardly repays you for the time you spend over it and for the annoyance it causes me." If my father had thrown books at our heads instead of hurling such sentences as these at us, we should have been more frightened

perhaps, but we should not have received a stronger impression of the depth of his displeasure. My mother, knowing my dear father better than we did, was much more indifferent to these little outbursts of impatience than we ventured to be. She put aside her odd-and-end basket for one evening, but it was sure to come out again in full force the next.

To this basket I owed much of the interest of these evenings, so anxiously did I speculate on the chance of each article that emerged from it being folded without creaking, or making the table creak; and yet that anxiety was nothing to the perpetual excitement in which my brother Charlie continued to keep Hilary and me by his manoeuvres. It was the delight of his life to torment us by the daring things he did, so cleverly, as just to escape attracting my father's attention, by what appeared the merest good luck in the world. I used to make severe resolutions, sometimes, about keeping my eyes glued down to my work for the whole evening, knowing well that Charlie would soon tire of his antics if we could help watching them; but I never could for long resist the fascination that obliged me to look up against my will. I used to hear Hilary's voice pause in his monotonous repetition of his lesson, and meaning only to telegraph a warning to him to mind his own business, I used to raise my head, and have my curiosity so excited by the anxious expression in Hilary's eyes, that it was impossible to avoid glancing across the table. Having once looked, all was over; I was certain to be wrought up to a fever-heat of nervous expectation by finding Charlie either in the act of inking the legs of a captured "Father-long-legs," preparatory to turning it loose for a promenade on my father's manuscript, or dropping peas dexterously down the edge of my father's book, or balancing his ink-stand on a suspension-bridge formed by a paper-knife and two infirm dictionaries. Whatever agonies Hilary and I endured, we gained nothing by making grimaces at the delinquent. We only had our warning looks reflected back to us, as exactly as Charlie's beautiful face could be puckered into an imitation of our plain ones. Besides, it was dangerous to tempt Charlie to begin mimicking; there was no saying where he would end, or how long our gravity would hold out against his attacks upon it. I remember one or two terrible evenings when he was too much

for us, and we allowed ourselves to be betrayed into sudden uncontrollable fits of laughter, sure to bring upon us a punishment which Hilary and I considered almost unbearable. My father said nothing on these occasions, but he gathered his books together, and retired with one candle to the fireless study, to work on in the cold and comparative darkness till our bed-time. How miserable I used to be if his eyes looked weaker than usual the next morning.

The silence and constraint of these evenings made us, perhaps, enjoy all the more the liberty which my mother accorded to us when my father was away at the lecture, and we children were left to her guidance. A great deal of talk went on on these occasions, and though Hilary's lessons did not progress favourably, we all enjoyed it very much. My mother loved talking as much as my father loved silence, and she had a singularly happy way of bringing the persons and things she described vividly before her auditors. Listening to her tales of her early days was better than reading a story-book to me, fond as I was of story-books.

"When I lived at home, before I had even seen your father," my mother would generally say, as commencement to her most interesting stories; I remember I used to be a little jealous of the half sigh that accompanied the words, and of the slightly plaintive look that used to come over my mother's face as she said them. Her eyes looked, I thought, like the eyes of a person looking back at a distant light; and very full of light and fresh air and sunshine were the pictures she used to draw for us. Her old home was a real possession to us children; we knew its every nook and corner, and were acquainted with every person who had much frequented it; with their words and ways, their peculiarities of character, and even their tricks of pronunciation and manner. Her world was sufficiently remote from ours to make her description of it as good as a glimpse into fairyland. My grandfather had been a Welsh country squire, whose importance and riches we exaggerated till he stood to us for a sort of impersonation of everything that was worshipful and dignified. My mother was his only child. They lived in an old rambling house, in one of the most beautiful and least-frequented parts of the coast of North Wales. She used to delight in describing the happy life that she led there during her childhood and early youth. She was her father's companion in long adven-

turous mountain rides, in rambles on the sea-shore, and in expeditions to different parts of his estate, every farmhouse on which, with its inhabitants, my mother remembered tenderly, and talked about, till we, too, grew into such intimate acquaintance with them, that we fancied we should be able to find our way up every mountain side, and down every glen, within the compass of our grandfather's possessions. Year by year we followed this bright life of hers, until, in our retrospects, we came to the sad day of trial which ended it abruptly. My grandfather, while still in the prime of life, died, and our mother was left a friendless and almost penniless orphan. We never liked her to dwell on the sufferings of the period which followed; we always tried to keep her engaged with the bright side of the picture; but now and then sad remembrances would start up, generally at the close of our gayest evenings. When they did come, I think mother felt it a relief to open her heart, even to us children. There was bitterness, as well as sadness, mixed up with her recollections. It was the bitterness which she found relief in expressing. She could have borne her own loss, she used to tell us, if only she had seen her father's memory honoured, and if the dependants he had favoured had been allowed to retain their old privileges. It had not been so; the estate had fallen into the hands of comparative strangers, and not only the squire's daughter, but the whole country-side, suffered from the change.

Our mother used to tell us, till we were almost tired of hearing, how the new possessor drove down in a carriage-and-four from London—"before my poor father was cold in his grave," she used to say; and how the new reign commenced by her having to resign her place as head of the house, and sink into the position of a dependant on the caprices of an over-bearing relative. "Not even a Wynne!" my mother would exclaim, holding up both her white hands. "My dear, Mr. Lester has no more real right to the place than that lamplighter who is coming down the street. I mean, that he is no more of a Wynne than that lamplighter. He claimed it only on account of some money that he had lent my father long before, when they were both young men—mortgages, I think your father calls it; and if I had been a boy, it somehow or other could not have happened. I should have had the estate, and Hilary would have had it

after me. I always feel now that it ought by right to be Hilary's; that it really belongs to him much more than to Richard Lester, who, though he married my mother's sister, was no relation at all to the Wynne family."

We all felt the same; and when my mother went on to describe the sad changes which Mr. Lester had introduced into the good old ways of the house, we glowed with indignation, as against personal and present injuries which we had all an equal right to resent. It was well that our sympathies were readily called out, for sometimes my mother's story would grow a little unintelligible to us children. We could not always see the sting of those sayings of her aunt's, which she used to repeat to us with a little glow on her cheek; or understand why the house should have been so much more intolerable when Sandford Lester, her cousin, returned home from Oxford for the long vacation, with his tutor, Mr. Scott. Neither could we enter into the feelings which gave our mother's voice a tone of triumph when she ended her stories always in the same words: "However, as you know, my dears, it was your father, and not my cousin Sandford, whom I married. Very glad I was to get away from them all. I was married at the end of that year, and we came to live in London, in that little house in West Street, which I have often pointed out to you, where grandmamma Scott died, and where Hilary was born."

When our mother's narrative reached this point, it invariably came to an end. She would suddenly take up some piece of work which she had allowed to fall idly on her lap and begin sewing diligently, while Hilary and Charlie, impelled by a similar impulse, would fall to buzzing over their lessons with a great show of attention.

The mention of my father, and grandmamma Scott, and the house in West Street, brought us all back to our present world, and made us recollect how idly we were spending our evenings. My mother had never visited Wales since she married, but her intercourse with Mr. Lester had not entirely ceased. A small, very small corner of the old estate—a few fields and an out-of-the-way farm-house—still remained in her possession. Some legal right had prevented her father from mortgaging this particular tract of land when he had entered into the mining speculations, upon the success of which he had risked the possession of all the rest of his

property ; it therefore remained inalienably ours. How proud we all were of those few fields ! Hilary's estate, we called it. It was the centre of the earth to us, as Jerusalem was to the old map makers.

Mr. Lester rented this farm of our mother. Every year, on certain never-varying days, the postman brought to our door a letter with a large coat-of-arms seal, addressed to Mrs. Scott, and containing a mysterious-looking paper within it. This was the rent of the farm, due to our mother, and sent always in the form of a cheque, and accompanied by a short friendly letter from her uncle, which my mother invariably read aloud to us. I think she felt the very reading of the post-mark outside like a breath of mountain air.

Nesta and I had pleasant holiday-times on those four days of the year. My mother used generally to take us with her in a cab to the bank, to get her cheque cashed, and then we used to go out shopping with the money.

My mother had a great respect for articles purchased with Morfa money. She expected them to last twice as long as any others, and to be twice as tenderly cared for. I, who was always unlucky about my dress, was well pleased that the money could seldom be spun out till the time arrived for my wants to be taken into consideration ; so many household deficiencies had to be first supplied ; but if my father or Hilary had chanced to express a wish which money could gratify, my mother was sure to remember it on those days. How radiant she used to look when she came in with her purchases and displayed them to us all. I can remember some golden evenings, when my father would sit at his end of the table, too happily absorbed with some newly-purchased treasure of a book to heed the gay noisy unpacking of parcels that was going on at ours ; or to notice, as I did, the accumulation of crumpled paper which my mother was complacently stowing away for his and my torture on future evenings.

With so little outward variety did our mornings and evenings succeed each other for many years, that, in looking back upon them, it is difficult to believe that each one changed us as it passed ; that we grew from childhood to youth in that noiseless way. For myself, my time passed, for the most part, in a pleasant dream ; the burden of self was laid aside, because I ceased to be myself to my own consciousness. I

peopled the house with phantoms among which I moved ; they were to me the substantial realities of my life, while the living people round me dwindled to shadows.

"When they spake
Each voice was thin as voices from the grave,
And deep asleep I seemed yet broad awake."

Unfortunately for me, Nesta was always watching to save me from the inconveniences of this dangerous state. She supplied me with hands, eyes, memory, and observation, and guided me about as a sleep-walker might be guided by a careful friend who feared for him the shock of a too sudden waking. In spite of all her watchfulness, however, I experienced every now and then the cold shock of being brought suddenly from my dreamland face to face with the realities of every-day life. Some rude contact with fact would shiver my whole existence to pieces, and a sudden overwhelming sense of self-disgust and utter discouragement would fall upon me. I cannot describe the pain to any one who has not felt it. It was usually the having failed in some very obvious duty, or made some very ridiculous mistake, that caused the scales to fall from my eyes. I used to hear, not faintly, but with the distinctness of a doom, the gentle despairing reproof, which was all my mother ever thought it worth while to bestow upon me. "Well, this is just like you, Janet ; I never expect any help or comfort from you—I give you up ! You never will be like anybody else ! What use is all your reading, when you can't do the simplest thing that you are told !"

I used always to acknowledge, in my inmost heart, the justice of these sentences. If I could have felt myself the least bit ill-used, I should not have suffered as I did. For all the time I had such a high ideal of what I should like to be, such a longing to be important to others, that it was no wonder I was thrown by those mild reproofs into a state of tumult, which puzzled my poor mother as much as my usual inertness did.

Hilary was my best helper in my times of disgrace and woe. We had many a talk over my troubles in the old garret, where I used to retire after a scolding, to cry at my leisure, and wait for Hilary's return from school. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that I talked, and that Hilary proved his sympathy by listening patiently while I abused myself

He used to sit by my side on the little window-seat, his elbows on his knees, and a puzzled frown on his face, only stopping me now and then to make me repeat some exaggerated phrase, and to question its truth in a matter-of-fact way, which sometimes forced me to laugh heartily, and brought me to reason. When I could not, or would not laugh, Hilary had another resource for bringing my complaints to an end. "Well, Janet," he would say, "if you are as stupid and ugly and unfortunate as you say, and if my mother does think that you will never do anything like other people, there is at least one thing which already you do better than any one else—you are the best hand in the world at looking out words in the dictionary, and finding out what sense there is in Virgil and Homer—so dry your eyes, and come downstairs, while there is time to go through to-morrow's construing before tea." I remember distinctly that Hilary always found more words to look out, and seemed more hopelessly puzzled about the sense of the passage he was preparing, when I was in disgrace with the elders of the family, than when things were going on smoothly.

I learned enough Latin and Greek during these half-hours to be able to profit by the extra lessons, which my father began to give Hilary in the evening, when the time for his finally leaving school drew near. There was a scholarship attached to the school of which my father was head-master, and my father, to the terrible dismay of the whole family, came to the conclusion that there was nothing to prevent Hilary's gaining it. No one ever thought of saying that Hilary was dull, or even not clever. My father, on one or two occasions, had been heard to pronounce that there was the making of a very solid scholar in him, but I for one felt that his scholarship would never be of my father's making. Hilary's was a slow-moving, exact mind, very observant of facts, and capable of pondering endlessly on their bearing on each other, but extremely indifferent to modes of expression and delicate questions of taste. He never could be made to see why Homer and Demosthenes were to be so devoutly worshipped for using one word in a particular place instead of another. Even I used to catch a spark of enthusiasm when my father, now and then, made impatient by Hilary's slow way of turning over the leaves of his book, would begin himself to read the portion that was to form their evening's

lesson ; rolling out the grand Greek words in his fine voice, and emphasizing one here and there with a loving intonation, as if the speaking of it gave him an actual sensation of pleasure. I used to look across anxiously at Hilary, but there never was any answering look of intelligence on his face ; the colour used to go tingling up to the very roots of his hair, but his agitation was caused by shame for his own stupidity and dread of what was sure to follow. It was always a bad beginning for the evening when my father read the lesson aloud. Hilary used always to begin his translation in a more husky, indifferent voice than usual, and my father's impatient tap-tap on the table used to come before the end of the first sentence.

Hilary's construing was seldom inexact, but even I knew why it tortured my father, and I could have told beforehand the point at which they would break down. Hilary's equivalent for the word my father had emphasized was sure not to be a happy one ; then the tap-tap ceased, and my father turned to Charlie with a look of relief. When this occurred, Nesta and I sometimes trembled in fear of a catastrophe, which, however, never came. Up to the moment of my father's calling upon him, Charlie would probably have been happily engaged in reading a story-book under the table, or intent on stealing a pinch of snuff from my father's box, to administer to a certain favourite black cat that shared my father's arm-chair, and was supposed to know more Greek than Hilary. We were always in terror lest his inattention should at length bring him into serious disgrace, but it never did. Two anxious minutes would follow my father's appeal, and then, after one rapid glance down the page, Charlie would begin, stumbling very much at first, and making a glaring mistake or two ; but warming up with the subject as he went on, and when the critical passage was reached, out would come some telling word—not the most literal translation, perhaps, but some happy, unexpected word—just what was wanted to bring out the picture or the sentiment which Hilary had let slip. Charlie would look up triumphantly as he spoke, shaking back the dark curls from his eyes in his easy, self-satisfied way, and my father would often, with a half bend of his head, say, "Thank you, Charlie ;" on which Charlie smiled exultingly, and slipped back to his book, or his experiment on the cat ; and Hilary swallowed a great lump

in his throat, and thought what he would have given to be addressed by his father in that tone, and looked at with that proud, fond look.

These evening lessons continued during three years, for Hilary failed *twice* in his trials for the scholarship. The third was necessarily the last and decisive time. Two trials and failures were not unusual; my father had spoken cheerfully about them, hiding bravely any mortification he might have felt, and treating Hilary with unusual kindness, and even a sort of respect, after his disappointments.

Charlie's first trial for the scholarship was obliged to take place in the same year as Hilary's last. My father was sorry that the two brothers should thus be placed in the position of trying against each other; but he thought that there was no chance of Charlie's succeeding on his first trial, and he considered the experience he would gain by passing through one examination so necessary to his success in the second, that he would not allow him to miss it.

I remember feeling a little provoked on the evening before the examination, when I heard Charlie observe to Nesta, that of course he had not been working hard; he knew well enough that he was not expected to do much; he should take it very easily.

"Certainly you would not win from Hilary, if you could?" said Nesta, as if there was really hardly any occasion to state so obvious a fact. She was kneeling before an arm-chair, in which Charlie was reclining, taking off his boots and putting on his slippers, as she said this. Hilary came from the other end of the room to take the boots out of her hand, and answered Charlie's remark, "Fair play and no favour, Charlie," he said; "win if you can. Do you think I shall be jealous of you?" There was something in Hilary's face as he looked steadily down that put all Charlie's little affectations and conceits to flight. He jumped up in his quick impulsive way, and threw his arms round Hilary's neck. "Hilary, I am an ass!" he said; "and if those fools of examiners were to put me before you, I would—"

"Take the scholarship and be thankful for it; you could not help yourself," Hilary concluded.

Charlie flung himself back into his chair as hastily as he had left it. "There, it is just as I have always said; you think me a brute, then?"

"Oh, boys, you have no time to quarrel to-night," Nesta interposed ; and, I remember, she considered it a striking proof of Charlie's brotherly affection that he allowed himself to be silenced by her coaxing, and consented to amuse herself quietly with a novel, while Hilary and I turned over the pages of his well-read Thucydides, and wondered in which of the least-known chapters it would be his fate to be tried on the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

" I read and sigh, I wish I were a tree ;
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade. At least, some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just."

HERBERT.

THE next morning was not only the first day of the examination, but Hilary's eighteenth birthday. We all stood at the window—Nesta, my mother, and I—to watch my father and the boys as they left the house. Hilary was well-grown for his age, very nearly as tall as my father ; and my father now always walked to school leaning on his arm. For the last two years, since a certain day, when I had confided to Hilary an uneasy suspicion of mine, that there was more amiss with our father's eyes than he chose to let any one know, Hilary had always been very careful to be in the way at the precise moment when my father left the house ; if he had not been at hand, my father would never have asked for him. This arrangement was not always convenient to Hilary. My father walked slowly, and the half-hour's quiet looking-over of the day's lessons which he would have had if he had stayed at home till Charlie started for the school-house, would have been very valuable to him—saved him many a rebuke and the loss of many a place in his class ; but since his mind had been awakened to share my fears, the wish to accompany my father in his walk through the crowded streets had always stood first with Hilary.

On that day they all three, for once, set off together ; Charlie, lagging a little behind the other two, looked rather

pale and glum ; I pitied him more than I pitied Hilary. He had, I knew, made up his mind to be beaten in the trial for the scholarship ; and though he intended to comfort himself with the conviction that it was with his own will, he was so accustomed to be first in every school-examination in which he took part, that I knew his vanity would find the failure a bitter pill to swallow.

My mother talked about the boys all day. She took me upstairs with her, to help to sort the linen (it was Monday morning) ; and while I stood by her side before the sacred linen closet, instead of receiving the usual weekly lesson on the relative value of our best table-linen brought from Morfa and marked with a "W," and the common every-day sort, marked with an "S," I was, almost for the first time in my life, made the confidant of my gentle mother's cares.

"You are getting old enough to be a comfort to me now, Janet," she said ; "I often want some one to talk to. Stay, my dear, you have dropped a best Wynne dinner-napkin on the ground—there, don't put it with the common coarse Scotts ; it belongs to this side of the closet. Yes, Janet, I do feel very lonely sometimes, and now I think my daughters ought to be a help to me. Your father is, of course, the very best man in all the world—(keep back those six Wynne dinner-napkins, my dear ; they want darning)—but then, you see, he always seems to be thinking of something else while I am talking to him, and you are just like him, Janet. I have allowed you to go on with all this learning because I thought you were a help to Hilary ; and, of course, everything must give way to the boys ; but when Hilary has once got his scholarship and gone to college, you must turn your attention to useful things. I feel nearly sure that he will succeed this time. I wonder whether the examiners will know who he is ? I told your father this morning that it was quite his duty to let them know. Surely they would never think of preventing his having a scholarship, which is only worth fifty pounds a year, if they knew that he ought, by rights, to have all those thousands which my uncle Lester is keeping from him ? I believe he might have had the scholarship long ago, if your father had represented things properly ; but, unfortunately, he never has felt as I do about Hilary's rights."

I listened to all this, and to much more of the same

kind, with the vague feeling of elation that very young people have when their elders first talk to them on an equal footing.

When I was dismissed at last with the six Wynne dinner-napkins to darn, I sat down to my work with the conviction that I too, as well as Hilary, had taken a step forward in life that day. As I sat at the window, straining my eyes, weak-sighted like my father's, with most elaborately careful darning, I built a castle in the air, in which I saw myself the central figure of the family, the confidant of my mother, the guide of my worshipping sister, the helper of father and brothers, the mainspring of the house. I was to be very humble all the time, and people were to wonder at my goodness and usefulness. During the last darn, I settled that my personal appearance should prove by no means so plain as my mother and Mrs. Wilton anticipated.

Just as I had finished, Nesta, who had been following my mother about the house, came in to help me to fold the napkins, and discovered that I had darned them on the *right*, or rather on the wrong side. I had taken extreme pains with the darning, and done it, as Nesta affectionately pointed out, beautifully, but it had not occurred to me that it signified on which side of the cloth I put my work. It had, of course, all to come out again, and I never shall forget the expression on my poor mother's face when she found us pulling far larger holes in her beloved damask than those I had originally offered to mend. For the moment, I think she despaired of me, and seriously in her heart wondered what bad end I could come to. I know I was thoroughly frightened about myself, and suffered for an hour or two such remorse as I have heard murderers described as feeling. I sat all the afternoon in the window-seat, my eyes too much inflamed with crying to be capable of accomplishing any more fine darning; while Nesta sat at my feet, swiftly with her deft fingers repairing the mischief I had done. She was almost as full of remorse as I was. "It was all my fault, Janet," she said again and again. "I wonder how I could leave you for so long, when you had such difficult work to do. I ought to have run backwards and forwards between mamma and you, to look after you both. It was so very thoughtless of me. I might so easily have put the work into your hands the right way, and then you would have done it beautifully ;

better than any one else could. You do everything beautifully, dear, only you want me just to look after you a little at the beginning and the end. "Why should you cry about that, Janet? I shall always be near to do the little easy things that it would be a waste of time for you to do."

Nesta's longing to be useful was certainly of a different kind from mine; it never occurred to her to make a picture about it.

I allowed myself to be comforted at last by her praise and fondness, and the work was finished and put away. As the evening closed in, my mother joined us in the window, to watch for my father and brothers' return from the school-house.

The usual hour passed, and they did not come; the street grew dark; there was hardly any further use in watching, but we could not make up our minds to leave the window. The lamplighter, Hilary and I always used to look out for when we were children, passed down the street; just as he lighted our lamp, the three figures we were waiting for passed under it; the sudden glare fell upon their faces, and I knew exactly how it was. My father was walking first, talking to Hilary, and Charlie was lagging behind. Nesta ran out to open the door for them, and my mother turned on the gas-light, and went to her usual place at the tea-table.

"Well, how has Hilary done?" she asked, as soon as they came into the room.

"Very creditably; better than I expected," my father answered cheerfully; but his tones did not satisfy me. I knew there would be nothing to be learned by studying his face, so I turned from one to the other of the boys. Hilary's face was steady, but pale; the paleness might be caused by fatigue; nothing would ever make him look triumphant. Charlie's face was flushed, and there was quite a new expression in his usually lazy brown eyes; a restless light, that I had never seen there before. Did it betoken mortification, or what new excitement?

We knew that we could not hear decisive tidings of the scholarship that evening. The examiners would take a day or two to consider the merits of the different candidates before declaring their decision. To be assured that Hilary had done well was all the satisfaction we had any right to expect.

It was a lecture night; and as my father was later than

usual in coming home we sat down at once to the tea-table. Hilary gratified my mother by eating with his usual school-boy appetite. Charlie drank large draughts of tea, and played with his spoon. My father soon pushed his plate and cup from him, rose from the table, collected his books, and walked to the door; then he turned, came back, and stood for a minute or two opposite Hilary, looking at him, "Hilary, my boy," he said, "it is better that you should not be kept in suspense; I have heard what the decision of the examiners is likely to be; You have done your best; I am satisfied with you; but you have failed again. Mr. Carr, the youngest of the examiners, my late pupil, told me before I left the school that, though you had done better than any of the candidates of your own age, he and his coadjutors considered that there was one among the younger scholars to whom they should feel obliged to give the first place. It is Charlie who has won the prize!"

I was prepared, but my mother and Nesta were not; they both burst out in exclamations that sounded very like indignation against Charlie. He had jumped up when my father spoke, quite white and trembling, and there was real pain in the tone of his voice when it rose above theirs. "Mamma, Nesta, Hilary, I could not help it! I did not mean—"

My father raised his hand and hushed them all. "Charlie was bound to do his best," he said, rather sternly. "I consider his success an accident; not owing to any superior diligence on his part, but to the unusual course one of the examiners took in his questions. He happened to draw out precisely the sort of knowledge and ability Charlie has. I am sorry, for his sake, that he has succeeded so soon and so easily; it will not be an advantage to him in the end. Now I must go. Hilary, my boy, I know you too well to think it needful to remind you in what spirit disappointment ought to be borne." In passing round the table my father put his hand for an instant on Hilary's head—a most unusual mark of favour with him—and then he left us.

For a minute or two after the door shut behind him we were all silent. Charlie, who was trembling so that he could hardly stand, sat down, and dropped his face in his hands. We none of us knew what to say to him; we could not congratulate him; and yet, after my father's reproof, we dare not do anything else.

Hilary looked appealingly at my mother, and then crossed the room and put his arm round Charlie's shoulder. "It is all right ; what is the matter, Charlie ?" he said.

At the touch of Hilary's hand, Charlie lifted up his head, but the glance he got at Hilary's face overcame the last remnant of his self-control ; nothing but flight could save him from the disgrace of being seen crying. He shook himself free, and dashed out of the room ; the next minute the slamming of the bed-room door shook the house.

My mother gave a great sigh, and began to arrange the cups and saucers in the tea-tray. Hilary went to the book-shelf, and took down a book. He held it before him for about half an hour without turning a leaf, while my mother, on the other side of the fireplace, sat wiping away slow tears that trickled silently down her face. Hilary felt each one, I knew. I saw that he was bracing himself up for some effort. Any expression of feeling was an effort to him. I quite understood what a conquest he had made over himself when he got up, and, kneeling down by the side of my mother's chair, said gently, "Mother, let us talk it over together."

My mother threw both her arms round his neck and uttered a sort of cry, as if some long pent-up feeling had found vent at last. "Oh, Hilary, it is not this that troubles me so ; it is not anything you have done. But I have had so many things to grieve me. You are my eldest, and I had planned so for you. When anything goes wrong with you, it brings it all back—all that I have suffered all my altered life. Oh, it seems so long and so sad, sometimes, Hilary." This was almost in a whisper.

Hilary made no answer, but he drew a little nearer, so as to make his strong young shoulder a more comfortable support for my mother's drooping head. He did not look like a schoolboy any longer. In that effort to rise out of his habitual reserve, he had taken his place once for all as the eldest son of the house, and my mother clung to him as she had never clung to any one before ; finding, in her silent, cold-mannered eldest son, the support she had so long wanted—a person she could lean upon, and yet not be in the least afraid of. I suppose her father had been this to her, and she had wanted him till, on that night, Hilary took his place. When I had looked once at Hilary and my mother, I felt as if I ought to leave them. I was not wanted ; and they would

talk, when the time came for talking, better alone. Nesta had slipped out of the room while Hilary had been pretending to read. I followed her to Charlie's bedroom. I should not have been welcome there half an hour ago. Nesta was Charlie's chosen confidant when he was in trouble, but by this time his tears were all wept away. I heard his voice in rather eager talk before I entered the room.

"Is that you, Janet?" he said, sitting upright in his bed, where he had been lying when I came in. "What is going on downstairs? What is Hilary doing?"

"Talking to mamma."

"How does he look?"

"Just as usual."

"Ah, what a comfort it is that he does not feel things as I do! He does not, now does he, Janet?"

"No, *not* as you do."

Charlie was too quick not to understand my tone. He gave an impatient kick against the foot of the bed. "That's just the way; you never give me credit for anything, Janet. I've been telling Nesta how this happened; but you won't believe me, I daresay, if I tell you."

"I should like you to tell me how you think it happened?"

"Oh, Janet, you don't know how bad I have felt since it was all over. When my father spoke, and when Hilary looked at me, I could have killed myself. When I went out this morning, I should have knocked any one down who had told me that I should try to win the scholarship from Hilary. I knew I could, but I meant to be careful. I wished just to beat those other fellows in the first class that my father thought I could not beat, but I determined not to answer a single question that Hilary passed, or to write better than he was likely to do. I thought I could imitate the dear old fellow's exact prosy style so perfectly. So I know I should have done if the right examiners had come; but one of the regular old fogies was taken ill, and who do you think the trustees of the school invited to come in his place? Cannot you guess? Has not Hilary told you? Well, then, it was Shafto Carr—the fellow who was head of the school when I first went there—who has just taken such wonderful honours at college—whom every one is talking about. What possessed him to come and examine us? I wish he had kept away. The instant he began I knew that it was all over with

me. His eyes drew the right answers out of me ; and he asked such glorious questions—questions that put thoughts into one's head. I could have shouted out the answers. I found it impossible to pass one. Even when it was not my turn to speak, and I was silent, he seemed to know that I understood him better than the others ; for when they hesitated or mistook his meaning, he just turned to me expecting an answer. If you had seen the sort of smile on his face, Janet, you would know how it was that I really could not disappoint him. When we sat down to write on a subject he chose for us, words would come to me. I forgot all about Hilary's style. I wrote on and on and on, till at last Mr. Carr came and took the paper out of my hand, and said that the time was up. He took my paper to the window, and began to read it first. I saw he was curious about it, and when his face brightened I was pleased for a time. At last, the examiners left the room, and my father came in, looking grave, and I woke up, as it were, and found out what I had been doing. I see you think this *no* excuse ; you think me hateful, Janet."

"I don't think it so good an excuse as you seem to do," I said. "What is Mr. Carr to you ? You say you could not bear to disappoint him, because he expected you to answer ; but you knew all the time that, by answering, you were preparing a bitter disappointment for Hilary and mamma."

"You don't understand me—you don't understand me Janet," Charlie groaned out.

To my surprise I found, when Nesta and I came to talk over the events of the day together, that she had more sympathy with Charlie than I had. She thought his explanation did in a great degree excuse his conduct. She confessed that she could imagine herself behaving in a somewhat similar way. "For instance," she said, "I think if I had heard a great deal about you, Janet, and thought about you, as Charlie has heard and thought of this Mr. Carr, and if then you had come suddenly and asked me to do something for you, I should have done it directly."

"But I am your sister, Nesta," I said ; "you cannot judge by such a comparison as that. You do everything I wish you to do because I am your sister."

Nesta shook her head. "I don't think it is because you are my sister that I love you so very much. If I had had a

different kind of sister, and then seen you, I should have loved you best, because you are just yourself."

"But I think that would have been wrong," I persisted, somewhat disturbed to find that there was a matter of opinion on which Nesta and I did not agree. It had been a disturbing day to every one in the house. I daresay Hilary was the one who went to sleep first, and slept the soundest.

CHAPTER IV.

"I hold it true with him who sings,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

In Memoriam.

I DON'T know how we all tumbled into our usual every-day routine the next morning, but I suppose we did so. It was the week before Easter; there were three more days of regular school-work, and then on Thursday evening Hilary made two journeys to the school, and brought away all his school-books. How I sighed as I watched him clapping the dust out of them, and arranging them out of the way on the highest shelf of the dining-room book-case.

Easter Monday was a morning of letters. Besides uninteresting letters for my father and mother, there was a letter for Hilary, and a large packet directed in an unknown hand to Charlie. Letters to the younger members of our family being rare, we all watched him curiously as he tore open the seals of his packet; a little closely-written note lay at the top. He opened it, looked at the date, and then at the signature.

"Cambridge—Shafto Douglas Carr—oh!" the exclamation was almost breathless; and holding the note high above us, he rushed to the window, though there was quite light enough at the table to read it. When he had finished a second slow perusal of the precious document, he turned his eyes to the breakfast table, and they were actually a little less bright than usual, dimmed with a moisture which he was vigorously trying to wink away.

My father had been watching him with an amused sort of

smile. "Well, what has young Carr found to write to you about? It can hardly be a secret, I suppose."

"No, it is no secret. I should like you to see."

Half hesitatingly and half proudly, he put the note in my father's hands, and then dived under the table to pick up the book, which he had thrown down in his impetuous rush to the window. Something he saw on the first page sent the blood rushing once more over his fair face. He looked so long at the blank leaf, that curiosity prompted me to peep over his shoulder and read, written in a peculiar handwriting, the words, "From the author," and underneath a Latin line—

"Credo equidem nec vana fides genus esse Deorum."

Meantime my father's mouth was wrinkling with unusual smiles. "How like Shafto Carr!" he exclaimed, when he had finished reading. "Well, well, four years of easy success have not made him much wiser. He is young enough to take delight in patronising, and you to find pleasure in being patronised; but I must tell you that the advice he gives you about your reading is not worth much. So he has sent you his book, has he?—great stuff I am afraid. Poor boy!"

I fancied the last exclamation must refer to Charlie; it seemed impossible that it could apply to the great, the fortunate Shafto Carr. Charlie did not hear it; he had plunged into the middle of his book,—and he did not get out of it for that, or for many more days. The rest of the party turned their attention to Hilary, who had now finished his letter, and was waiting for an opportunity to speak.

"It is an invitation from my old schoolfellow, George Armstrong, to stay with his friends at Ryde. He has heard the result of the examination, and he says—read what he says."

"A sensible, kind letter; the letter of a true friend," my father pronounced it to be. After a few minutes' talk, an anxious "Can you spare me?" from Hilary, and a decided "You had much better go," from my father;—my mother, Nesta, and I rose from the breakfast-table with a great sense of hurry and press of business upon us, to prepare Hilary's clothes for his first, his very first, visit from home.

Hilary left us on Wednesday, and the house sank into a state of unnatural quiet when he had gone. Charlie, who

usually found employment for Nesta and me during the holidays, now divided his time between reading Mr. Carr's book and making unsuccessful attempts at composing a letter of thanks for it.

I think I should have been quite miserable if it had not been for a few words of talk which I had with my father on the evening of the second day after Hilary left us. He met me in the twilight, roaming up and down the passage at the top of the house, unable to make up my mind either to sit and read in the garret without Hilary or to come down to my usual place by the dining-room fire. I say "*met*," for we did *meet* in the middle of the passage ; but, as I reflected with amazement afterwards, he must have come up there to look for me. He stopped me, when I almost ran against him in my moody walk, and put his hand on my head. "So, Othello's occupation's gone," he said. "Poor Othello !"

"Papa, I don't know what you mean about Othello," I said.

"Ah, true ; I remember I put a black mark over Othello. You are a good child for respecting the black marks. I have wanted to speak to you for several days, but you kept out of my way. Now that it is over, I must thank you for the service you have done me in helping Hilary through his school-work."

"You—Oh Papa !"

"How old are you, Janet ?"

"Fifteen," I answered. He put his hand under my chin, looked into my face, and once more stroked down my rather untidy hair.

"Poor child, I expect you have a good deal of difficult work before you, with yourself, and perhaps for other people. It won't do you any harm to remember that the first piece of work that it fell into your way to do you did thoroughly, and that your father thanked you for it."

It was too much ; and seeing that I could not speak, he was going, but I held him fast. "It was easy work," I faltered, "and I liked it—there was no goodness in that."

"No goodness, but this encouragement, Janet : You have tasted the pleasure of work, and, having accomplished the easy task, you are ready for the hard. For learning to darn the right side of the stuff, for instance," he added, smiling.

"It is not any one thing," I said, while my whole heart

thrilled with gratitude for this unlooked-for sympathy. "I could learn to do one, or two, or any number of tasks; it is *altering myself*—learning to live down among real things that is so difficult. Do you—oh, papa!—do you really think that I shall ever be able to do that?"

"Do you honestly wish it, Janet?"

"Sometimes, but not always," I answered. "Sometimes I feel as if I could not do without a few fancies to walk about among: reality is so bare. How do other people do?" I asked, timidly.

"Some people *love* more than you do, Janet; and to those who love their fellows much, and God even a little, there is no poorness or barrenness in the most monotonous routine of common life. Such people would smile at your notion of *coming down to real things*. Some day you and I must have some further talk. I don't wish you to suppose that, in confining you to *reality*, I am confining you to the *seen* things. Some day, but not now; for I fancy that, if you went downstairs, you might find that you could do something to help your mother."

A quiet, grave kiss on my forehead ended our talk. I should have liked to run away and shut myself up in my room, to think over what my father had said, but I did not yield to the wish. I went downstairs bravely, and finding my mother in a state of distress about some winter furs which, having been put away in a damp closet, were now suspected of harbouring the moth, I volunteered my services for a thorough turn out of the closet, and actually outdid my mother in zeal during the next two days in carrying out my design. So, with one help and another, the week of Hilary's absence slipped away. It wanted only two days to his return, when, one evening after tea, Charlie and I grew so disputatious over a half-finished game of chess, that my father, who was very tolerant of noise during the holidays, was driven to exchange a volume of Basnage's "Church History" for a newspaper. It was a tacit reproach to us; I felt it, but I was violently bent on disproving some wild assertion of Charlie's; and the impatient rustling of the paper as my father turned from side to side, without being able to find anything to arrest his attention, only incited me to talk louder and faster. Charlie's smile grew more provoking as I grew more vehemently in earnest. We were on the verge of one of our

brotherly and sisterly quarrels, when we were startled by a sonorous "Ah!" coming from behind the unfolded paper. We both looked round a little apprehensively. Had he been listening to us instead of reading? No—there was no displeasure, but some eagerness in the tone in which he called to me the moment we were silent.

"Janet, my child, come here; read this letter to me; my dim-sighted eyes must be playing me a strange trick; here is a name that I must be reading wrong."

I took the paper, my eye caught a word, and instead of reading aloud I read to myself. What a strange sensation that reading was, and how choked with excitement I felt, when my father's impatient "Well, Janet, well?" and a tremulous "What is the matter, Janet?" from my mother, obliged me to read aloud.

"It is a letter," I began; "it is headed—

" 'RESCUE FROM DROWNING.

" 'To the Editor of the Times.

" 'SIR,—A gallant action was performed here yesterday, which deserves note. A gentleman fell into deep water from the pier at Ryde, and, being unable to swim, had sunk twice, when a youth (whose name we have since ascertained is Hilary Scott, and who, we understand, is the eldest son of the learned head-master of B—— College), hearing a cry, rushed to the spot, and, stripping off his jacket, jumped in, and succeeded in saving the drowning man. His own life was, however, nearly lost in the attempt, for the sinking man clutched him round the neck, and drew him under water, and, but for the timely arrival of a boat, probably two corpses would have been brought to shore. If you think a brave action, done by a youth of eighteen, worth recording, perhaps you will give a place to this letter, from

" 'SPECTATOR.'"

How strange the commonplace, kind, concise words of the letter sounded to our excited ears.

"Probably two corpses," my mother groaned, and dropped her face between her two trembling hands. My father got up and walked rapidly up and down the room with that light of enthusiasm on his face that I used to see there sometimes during his evening reading. To think of its being called up by the record of one of Hilary's doings!

Nesta threw herself into my mother's arms, and joined her in the flood of tears that followed the first shock. I had no inclination to cry, but I wished very much that I could have invented an excuse for leaving the room and rushing violently up and down stairs for a few minutes.

When we were composed enough to talk, there was a great hubbub. My mother was for stopping the first cab, rushing off to the station, and starting for Ryde by the next train, that she might ascertain for herself that the boat *had* arrived in time, and that *two corpses* had not been brought to shore. She was only quieted by some very earnest representations from my father, and by my producing a letter of Hilary's bearing a later date than the newspaper, and stating, with unusual distinctness, "I am quite well, and hope to be home the day after to-morrow." Then my father congratulated himself on the firmness with which, three years ago, when we first went to the seaside, he had carried his point of having the boys taught to swim. My mother's acknowledgment that he had been right was not given so unreservedly as he expected. She was not clear that it had been a good thing. If Hilary had not known that he was an expert swimmer, he would not have placed himself in danger. She was not sure that Hilary had done right in risking a life so precious, till it occurred to her that the gentleman he had saved might have a mother living; and *then*, with tearful eyes, she breathed a deep thanksgiving, which included that other mother's escape as well as her own. Charlie and Nesta wondered whether Mr. Carr had read the letter in the newspaper, and what he thought of it. I felt less inclined to talk than the others, and finally escaped to have my three or four runs up and down stairs. What a brilliant fancy world that journey carried me up into!

The next morning brought a letter from Morfa. It was not the usual time for receiving Morfa letters, and it was addressed to my father instead of to my mother. Nesta observed rather disconsolately that it would do us no good, as my father never read his letters aloud as my mother did.

Charlie was in too exalted a state of mind for curiosity about Morfa letters, but an awakening of ideas, suggested by the name, induced him to bring out a piece of information which he would otherwise probably have preferred enjoying alone.

"Mother," he asked eagerly, "do you know who Mr. Carr's mother is?"

"No; how should I, my dear?" my mother answered absently, with eyes fixed on my father, who was slowly unfolding his letter.

Charlie felt that the pith of his news must be given at once, if he would command an audience.

"I'll tell you, then. She is a person you know, a person who once lived near Morfa. She is that same Lady Helen Vane of whom you have often spoken to us—who used to stay with Mr. Lester at Morfa."

I joined my mother in an almost indignant exclamation of incredulity. We both felt something too like spite against Mr. Carr to be willing to allow his mother the distinction of having ever had any connexion with Morfa. Charlie had to give up his authority for his presumptuous assertion before we would believe him, and to confess a clandestine visit to our bookseller's, where, under pretence of wanting an address for an important letter, he had borrowed a "Burke's Landed Gentry," and studied the genealogy of the Carr family. My mother, once convinced, was as eager to hear more of her old acquaintance as Charlie was to tell what he had discovered; and we were soon so engrossed in our subject that the Morfa letter was forgotten, and my father had actually to knock upon the table when he wanted to attract our notice.

"Nesta was complaining just now," he said, "that I never read my letters aloud; would you like to hear this one?"

"Yes indeed," we all cried.

"Dear Friend," my father began, "'I have just been reading a letter in to-day's *Times*, that has strongly brought to my mind the fact that I am growing old. You were a young-man when I first knew you, and now I see you have a son growing into a young man—a son, apparently, you need not be ashamed of. For old friendship's and relationship's sake, I should be glad to know more of your family. What are you going to do with this son? I shall be in London at the end of the week. Ask my niece to take me in for a day or two, and we will consult together over his future. If you can invent any way in which I can be of use to your family, you will do me good. Yours, R. Lester.'"

It took us young ones some time to understand that the

phrase "my niece" signified our mother, and that the light sentence in which it figured actually contained the astounding proposition of a visit to our house from our great-uncle, Mr. Lester. My exclamations of delighted surprise were, I suppose, the loudest, for I remember they brought upon me a rebuke from my mother.

"I am surprised at you, Janet," she said, a little indignantly; "you seem to think that my uncle's coming is something to laugh at. You don't consider what trouble it will cause me; and only yesterday, when you spilled the ink over the best bedroom carpet, you said it did not signify, for no visitor would ever come to our house. I hope this will be a lesson to you; it seems almost like a judgment. What are we to do, my dear" (turning to my father), "to prevent my uncle from noticing the state of the best bedroom carpet—indeed, every one of the carpets?"

Conscious of many sins of commission against the carpets, of ink-stains innumerable that might be laid to *his* charge, my father interposed hastily, "My dear, I will answer for Mr. Lester's not seeing a single article of furniture while he stays. Do you suppose he comes to London to count the spots on your carpets?"

"Perhaps not," my mother assented; but she appealed to my father's conscience—Could he look round and say that there was a thing in the room that he should not be ashamed of Mr. Lester's seeing?

Yes, indeed, my father assured her, he could conscientiously say that there were several things in the room of which he was not in the least ashamed—one especially, that Mr. Lester would be surprised to find so little faded; and two others that he really thought could not be matched for fairness.

A glance of smiling meaning from my mother's face to Charlie and Nesta, who were just then whispering with their beautiful heads close together, explained the enigmatical sentence to me. If it had not, my mother's countenance would. A colour, as fresh and delicate as Nesta's, rose to her cheeks; but she shook her head. Fond compliments were well, but a little carefulness over the carpets would have been still better; for, however beautiful one's children, or fond one's husband, there were feelings about furniture that lay too deep to be talked away. My father left the room, advising my mother to ask Janet to tell her the history of a

certain noble Roman lady, called Cornelia ; and my mother stopped my mouth, just as I was plunging into it, by begging me earnestly to put all *Roman* ladies quite out of my head, and attend to some directions she should have to give me about making myself look a little more like an *English* one.

During the next few days, in spite of my late resolution, I was perpetually tumbling into a delightful dream-region of wonderful anticipations, where Mr. Lester, Hilary, and the man whose life he had saved, played equally conspicuous parts. When I was forcibly dragged out, I found myself in a very dusty, topsy-turvy world ; for my mother's excitement at the prospect of her uncle's visit had moved her to institute a very rigorous house-cleaning, and Nesta and I were expected to take a just share in the work. In the thick of the tumult, on the eve of the day on which Mr. Lester was expected, Hilary returned. I had been longing for a sight of him. It seemed to me an immense time since he went, and his adventure, by dint of being much dwelt upon, had altered my thought of him. It was Hilary, our *own* Hilary, and yet it was a hero we were expecting that night I dare say I should not have been disappointed in our first meeting after our first parting, if circumstances had not been very cruelly against me. Instead of arriving in the evening, as his letter had led us to expect, owing to some fresh arrangement of his journey, he walked quietly into the house about four o'clock, I was the only person who recognised his knock, and it came at an unlucky moment for me. I was at work dusting some dishes in a dark closet on the upper staircase-landing, where my mother kept spare china. My face and hands were dusty, and I had a large towel of the coarsest "*Scott*" kind thrown over my arm. While I was mechanically rubbing a plate many unnecessary times, I planned how Hilary would look when he returned, what my father would say, and what my mother would say. Perhaps the "rescued stranger" would accompany Hilary. Would he fall on his knees before my mother to thank her for having such a son ? No, I could not quite fancy that. The "rescued stranger's" past was not clear to me, and my reverie was broken before I could decide on it. The well-known knock threw me into an indescribable state of agitation. I rushed blindly downstairs, and, seeing Hilary in the act of hanging up his hat behind the door, I flew up to him, threw my arms round his

neck, and a great fold of the "Scott" towel over his head and eyes.

"What is the matter? What on earth are you doing?" in Hilary's sharpest tone, brought me speedily to my senses. It was a minute before we could get free, and then a very ruffled head of hair, and a red, indignant face, emerged from the folds of the towel.

"I wish you had a little more common sense, and would mind what you are about, Janet," he began.

"I felt I deserved a scolding, but I could not stay to let him finish his sentence. I had taken meanwhile a glance round the hall, and discovered that we were not alone. A young man, somewhat older-looking than Hilary, stood in the hall, and, rapid as my glance was before I turned and fled, it showed me that he was on the edge of a burst of laughter. It came before I was out of hearing—frank, good-tempered laughter, ringing through the house so clearly that the door of the dark closet which I shut upon myself could not keep it out. I must chronicle that first laugh, and remember how I sat in the dark working myself up into a state of swelling indignation against it. Oh, it was bitter! If Hilary had laughed at me I could have borne it; but for the "rescued stranger"—for I concluded that this was he—to enter our house in that mocking spirit, to disappoint all my hopes—it was too much. I did not know whether I hated myself or him most.

Nesta routed me out of the closet in time to dress for tea, and Hilary met me in the passage as I was leaving my room to go downstairs.

"Come, Janet, shake hands properly now," he said. "I wish you had not run away. It would have been better to have stayed and shaken hands with George Armstrong."

"George Armstrong! Was he there too?"

"Yes. Did not you see him? I am sure you saw him."

"Indeed I did not. I saw no one but the stranger, and—oh! Hilary—I am so much disappointed in him!"

"Who? What stranger?"

"The man you saved from drowning, to be sure."

"I declare, Janet, I believe you are out of your mind. What on earth should I have brought him home for? There is no one here but George Armstrong, whom you have seen several times before. You ought to have recollected him."

Not having any satisfactory explanation to give of my folly, I remained silent, and walked soberly down into the dining-room. My mother, who had been out all the afternoon, had not yet returned. My father was standing with his back to the dining-room fire, talking to his late pupil, George Armstrong. He broke off in his discourse as I entered to say, "Armstrong, this is my eldest daughter, Janet, who I think you will hardly remember; she has grown so much since you used to come here four years ago."

Mr. Armstrong walked across the room to meet me, and gave a hearty shake to my stiff hand.

"Oh, we have met to-day before, and I knew Miss Janet directly, but she would not include me in the warmth of her welcome."

"She is very glad to see you," my father answered for me. "We are all delighted to have you here again. Sit down again, George. Come here, Janet, child, and listen to what we are talking about."

It was clearly a bright evening to my father. There were few things he enjoyed more than such a meeting as this with a favourite old pupil, who, since he had passed from under his care, had justified his good opinion and done credit to his training. Seeing him look so happy, I was obliged to put away my ill-humour; and when I had taken my place by my father's side, the conversation was resumed from the point where I had interrupted it. It was such talk as my father loved, and rarely enjoyed—about new books and new thoughts, and the stir and progress they were making in the literary world. I was not long in perceiving that Hilary's friend was better able to hold his own in such discourse with my father, than the generality of his visitors were. I noticed that, when any subject came up on which he and my father did not think alike, he never argued or set his opinion improperly forward; and that yet, just before the subject dropped, when my father had laid down the law to his heart's content about it, he contrived to say a word or two, which left the impression that his conviction was not changed. Young as he was, he held all his opinions tenaciously. I did not, I confess, however, come to that conclusion unassisted; my father shook his head once and remarked, "Words are wasted on you; you are as obstinate as ever, George."

"Not obstinate, I hope, sir; but I suppose that words are

wasted on me. I get my opinions in some other way than through other people's words, and if they go, they must go as they came. Luckily, I can do with a few very broad ones, and am willing to let other people take them or leave them, as they like."

"Yes," said Hilary, laughing, "as long as people *do* what *you* like, you will let them *think* as *they* like; you pretend to be liberal, and you are the greatest tyrant in the world."

Soon after, my father mentioned Shafto Carr. "How do you like him?" he asked. "How have you got on together at Cambridge? I don't think you were always the very best friends in the world in your school-days."

There was a slight hesitation. "I have seen very little of him. We are in different sets."

"Ah, I comprehend," said my father.

"How do you like his poetry?" asked Charlie.

"I don't understand it."

"That is no answer," objected my father. "Some people admire most what they don't understand."

"I pity you," cried Charlie, scornfully, "if you can admire nothing but what you understand."

"Pity me as much as you please, but let us be accurate. I did not say that I could not admire *anything* that I could not understand; I only implied that I did not admire Carr's poetry, because I could not understand it."

"He's not obliged to write down to your understanding," said Charlie, hotly.

"Nor I to admire what he writes."

"I do believe you are proud of not admiring."

"No, I am not; I am ready to admire as soon as you can show me why I should. Miss Scott, will you help him; I assure you it is a great trouble to me that I have so little imagination. I believe you imaginative people look down upon us matter-of-fact ones as if we had no souls; don't you?"

If I could have said anything very scornful in answer to this speech, which I considered a direct insult, I would gladly have done so. Unfortunately, nothing very clever would come, and I was obliged to remain stupidly silent. Just then, to my great relief, our mother entered the room hurriedly, agitated by the news that Hilary had arrived. After the ridicule that had fallen on my own attempt at welcoming the hero home, I felt rather nervous about what my mother

might do, and I wished Mr. Armstrong miles away, when I saw the flushed face with which she entered, and the two trembling hands held out towards Hilary. I made a little rustling with my work to drown the expected whispered words, but I need not have troubled myself; my mother's greeting to Hilary was too loud for my devices to cover.

She caught his hands, turned his face to the light, and stood for a minute or two looking at it; but no greeting too sacred for satirical ears to hear, followed the silence.

"Hilary," she exclaimed, in an anxious accusing tone, "it is just as I expected; you have come home with a bad cold in your head."

"No, indeed, I have not, mother," cried Hilary, hastening to justify himself, as he always did when my mother brought this terrible accusation against him. "I assure you, I have not taken the least cold."

My mother shook her head and sighed, "You need not make excuses to me, Hilary; I always know when you have a cold. Oh, Hilary! that is all I get by letting you go from me. I shall never be able to trust you again. I dare say, now, you never even thought of changing your clothes."

The greetings were all over now, and Hilary looked as much at home as if he had never been away. During tea, however, a little talk took place about Hilary's adventure. Mr. Armstrong was the chief speaker. He began telling the story in a light half-joking way, that grated terribly on my ear; but when he came to describe the anxious moment when, after brave struggles, Hilary's head for the second time sank under the water—his voice took quite another tone; a sort of thrill passed through us all at his words. I saw even my father's strong breast heave. My mother, in a tearful voice, inquired after the man whose life Hilary had saved. Was he grateful enough? Did he know how much Hilary was suffering from his exertions on his behalf? Hilary here interposed an indignant protest against the notion of his having suffered anything, or of there being any excuse for all this fuss and nonsense. His patience was so clearly exhausted, that Mr. Armstrong favoured his desire to have no more sentiment talked on the subject, and resolutely nipped in the bud every attempt which my mother and I made to see the rescued man in a pathetic or even interesting light. He had not a *mother*. He would not have been a dreadful loss to his wife and family.

He was a middle-aged man, rather stout, and called Higgins. Some ill-natured people had said that he was tipsy when he fell from the pier. Mr. Armstrong did not, himself, see how he could have performed the feat under other circumstances, but he did not consider the fact so clearly proved that we need believe it if we preferred to doubt.

My mother bore the revelation of these disenchanting facts with more equanimity than I did. It did not take her long to decide that the man who had been the cause of Hilary's having a cold in his head was not likely to be worth much ; and holding Hilary's hand in hers, she could, with one more shuddering thanksgiving for his escape from danger, dismiss the subject altogether from her thoughts. He was safe by her side and she had not been building castles in the air.

I hardly knew whether to feel most bewildered or provoked. Never before, in my life, had fancy and fact come into such rude contact. When Nesta and I retired to our room, I sat down on the side of our bed, in too moody a frame of mind to begin the business of preparing for bed. Was life worth the trouble of such constant dressings and undressings ? I cynically asked myself, and I meditated on the possibility of reducing myself into a state of utter indifference, as to *being* or *not being*, like the Hindoo's Nirvana, of which I had been lately reading to my father. At length Nesta, having risen from her prayers, came and seated herself at my feet.

"Does it matter so much, Janet ?" she said.

"Yes, it does matter, Nesta," I answered. "I should have thought you would have understood how much. If you don't, we won't talk about it."

"Let me say one thing. Do you remember the sentence that you liked so much in the German book you translated last ? Was it not something like this : that we should wish to be to God what a man's hand is to him ? Oh, Janet, don't you see, Hilary was God's hand, and He has used him perhaps to save a soul. It does not matter what kind of person it was, God wanted it done. Don't you see how beautiful it is, that Hilary should have done it ?"

I did see ; it was as if a veil fell from before my eyes. Yes, I had been making pictures ; Nesta had looked at the reality. I went to bed with a triumphant heart, determined to brave Mr. Armstrong's satire, and not to attempt aiming at Nirvana.

CHAPTER V.

"A rosebud set with little wilful thorns."

TENNYSON.

BY way of contrast to Hilary's having arrived too soon, the other guest, whose coming I had been dreaming over, made himself waited for. During two long evenings we sat in the drawing-room, with the best tea-things on the table, listening to the sound of the carriages as they passed down the street, and feeling a constant disappointment when each one passed our door.

About nine o'clock on the second evening, I grew restless over my book, and stole down to the dining-room to enjoy a brisk walk up and down the room by the firelight. I was rather ashamed of this exercise, and always carefully closed the door after me when I indulged in it. Charlie had peeped in upon me once or twice, and accused me of rushing up and down like a steam-engine. I hope there was some exaggeration in this, but I must confess that I sometimes found myself much out of breath when some sudden interruption brought me to a stand-still. I remember what it was that checked my romance-weaving that night. My sleeve caught and threw down a volume of Uhland's poems, which Charlie had been reading during tea. I stooped and picked it up, and while smoothing out a crumpled leaf, my eye fell on this verse :—

*"Die Sehnsucht und der Träume Webe,
Sie find der weichen Seele süß;
Doch edler ist ein starkes Streben,
Und macht den schönen Traum gewiß."*

"To long and weave a woof of dreams is sweet unto the feeble soul, but nobler is stout-hearted striving, and makes the dream a reality."

"The feeble soul"—"nobler is stout-hearted striving!"—those were words to sit still and ponder upon. My "woof of dreams" floated wide, and I retreated gently to the hearth-rug to do penance by learning the verse by heart. While I was thus occupied, I heard, as I thought, my father come home from the lecture and go upstairs to the drawing-room; it must therefore be supper-time, and I knew I ought to follow

him, but I could not help lingering to read and repeat my verse once more. While I was saying it for the last time, with my eyes shut, I heard Nesta come into the room to summon me.

"In one moment, Nesta," I said. There was no answer, but I heard a quick step, very unlike Nesta's. I opened my eyes and looked up. Nesta was not there. A young girl, whom I had never seen before, hastily approached the fireplace. She had a walking-dress on and a heavy shawl, which, on reaching the hearth-rug, she threw off with an impatient gesture. A quick glance all round the room, which took me in, followed, and then she began vigorously pulling at her gloves. I was so much taken by surprise that I watched in silence. The gloves fitted tightly, and the young lady showed great want of skill in handling them. She tore them off, and, to my utter amazement, rolled them up into a ball, and threw them hastily into the brightest cave of the glowing fire I had been reading by. I had a sort of reverence for gloves, having been all my life subject to grievous penalties for losing them, and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw a pair treated in this sacrilegious fashion.

"What did you do that for?" I asked, breathlessly.

The gloves had begun to burn by this time, and gave out a flame that showed me a brown and red face, surmounted by a tangle of thick black curls, through which two large black eyes, at once fierce and shy, looked at me.

An answer quite as uncereemonious as my question came. "Oh, I have been meaning to do it all day. Grandpapa *made* me put on *those* this morning, when we left Morfa, and I made up my mind that the first time I saw a fire I would burn them."

"It was very wrong," I suggested.

"I had made up my mind to do it."

The second answer was spoken more hesitatingly than the first; and at the last word, the fierce expression in the eyes, that were looking at me, suddenly went out, and they grew altogether wild and wistful, with a strange unhomelike look in them, such as I imagined the wood-and-water people, of whom I read in my German tales, might wear when they came among mortals. The idea that she was speaking to a stranger seemed suddenly to dawn upon my visitor, now that the excitement of gaining her object had passed. With a

shrinking movement she turned from me, and escaped from the room as suddenly as she had entered it. I did not follow her ; I sat still for some minutes on the hearth-rug, wondering what this unexpected apparition might signify. It grew clear to me, at last, that Mr. Lester must have arrived, and that he had brought with him the little granddaughter of whom our mother had sometimes spoken to us.

The appearance of an unexpected guest would not, I feared, be welcome to my mother. I knew she would feel herself obliged to stay in the drawing-room whatever agonies she might be enduring, so I took upon myself to give some directions to the servants about preparing for the young lady's accommodation for the night before I went upstairs.

My mother was presiding at the tea-table, when at last I repaired to the drawing-room. She had contrived to leave the room for a moment or two, for she had got her prettiest cap on—and how pretty she looked in it ! with the bright glow on each cheek that excitement always called there, and the soft, glistening of her blue eyes, which told of a few recent tears. My father stood by the fireplace. There was a slight, most unusual flush on his face too, and a half-sad, half-dreamy look of recollection in his eyes, which he was shading from the light with his left hand, as he always did now when he was not using them. I looked at the familiar faces first ; I was so anxious about the stranger's long-imagined face, that I liked to put off seeing it as long as I could. When I had looked, I did not know whether I was satisfied or not. Mr. Lester was a much older-man than I had expected to see. Instead of the upright carriage my mother had so often described, there was a stoop in the shoulders, and the face was so ploughed up into innumerable lines and crossings, that I could make nothing out of it. I gave up the attempt to read it at the first glance ; it was beyond my fathoming. No one was speaking when I came in. My mother mentioned my name. Mr. Lester turned ; he fixed his cold grey eyes upon me, and I had a sensation of growing very small and insignificant, and feeling a cold shudder run down my back.

"Your eldest daughter is not at all like what you were," he remarked to my mother ; "the other would be if she had a colour."

"Yes," my mother said, sighing ; "but Nesta never has a

colour; your granddaughter has all the roses." The two children were sitting together, and as my mother spoke we all looked at them. They were too busy to observe us. Nesta was perseveringly offering refreshments to her guest, which the other was as perseveringly refusing. If one had been bold and the other timid, the contrast could hardly have been so striking as it was between the one's gentle, and the other's sulky, shyness. The little Welsh girl certainly did not appear to advantage, but I was surprised at the expression of disapprobation, almost dislike, which came upon her grandfather's face as he looked at her.

"Rosamond," he said, sharply, "don't you see that Miss Nesta has been offering you some biscuits for the last five minutes? Take one, and don't keep her waiting an instant longer."

It would have required a strong will in a grown-up person to have resisted that tone of command. I was surprised, and almost frightened, at the reluctance and self-will which his granddaughter ventured to show in her manner of obeying it. She very slowly advanced her hand, at the rate of a quarter of an inch a minute, took a broken morsel of biscuit, and placed it on her plate.

"Eat it, Rosamond; I desire you to eat it," said Mr. Lester.

"Oh; do eat it, you must be so hungry," pleaded Nesta.

Rosamond turned her eyes on Nesta for a moment, and then suddenly snatched up the biscuit and put it into her mouth. I could see her slender throat swell with the effort it cost her to swallow it.

Mr. Lester turned to my mother. "I really owe you many apologies," he said, "for bringing this little wild girl into your well-ordered family without asking your leave, but she shall intrude on you only one night, and by-and-by I will explain my reason for bringing her so suddenly to London."

My mother's kindness inspired her with a happy answer that set us all at ease. "Who but me should you bring her to?" she said. "I was a wild Welsh girl once; I shall think you are reflecting on my past behaviour if you apologize for Rosamond's."

"Thank you," Mr. Lester said, gravely.

A few minutes afterwards, when Mr. Lester was engaged in conversation with my father, my mother directed me to

accompany Rosamond to our room, where a bed had been arranged for her.

It was a new experience, I remember then, for Nesta and me to go to bed without a confidential talk over the events of the day. Our guest did not make up for the constraint her presence placed upon us by furnishing any conversation of her own. Our united efforts to draw her out produced very little beyond replies in monosyllables ; but when we had left off trying to make her talk, and believed her to be safely asleep, she disconcerted us extremely by suddenly vouchsafing a remark. Nesta, in the lowest possible whisper, had asked my opinion of that "poor girl ;" before I could answer, a clear, rather shrill voice, from the opposite end of the room, took up the word.

"Why do you call me a poor girl ? I am not poor now. I was poor once, when papa and mamma and I lived together ; but I am not now. You should not call me poor."

"I called you poor because I was sorry for you," Nesta said. "I was afraid you were not happy."

There was a long pause, and then the voice, having again resumed its sullen tone, said slowly, "I don't know what you mean ; I am happy enough when people let me alone."

We took the hint, and left the enigma of her strange behaviour undiscussed for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

"I had my wish and way :
My days were strewn with flowers—
There was no month but May ;
But with my years did sorrow twist and grow,
And make a party unawares for woe."

HERBERT.

MR. LESTER persevered in his intention of leaving us on the following day, though my mother brought forward many arguments to induce him to prolong his visit. He had a long interview with my father during the morning ; and immediately after our early dinner he took leave of us, carrying his granddaughter away with him. Nesta and I were not

very sorry to see her go, for we had spent a tedious morning in trying in vain to amuse her.

My mother had a headache, and retired to her room when our visitors left us. Our father shut himself up again in his study, and we children spent one of those idle, talking afternoons that people often inflict on themselves when a long-talked-of visit is over. We were all engaged to spend the evening at the house of one of the under-masters of B—School. My mother was usually rather fond of going out in the evening, but her headache made her feel indisposed for any exertion, and I easily obtained permission to stay at home and make tea for her.

I felt very happy when, after wrapping Nesta up well for an evening walk, and seeing her depart with my father and the boys, I returned to my mother's little dressing-room, to prepare the table for a delightful cosy *tête-à-tête* tea.

I really had not stayed at home from any interested hope of having a private talk with my mother about the Lesters; but as the evening passed on, my mother professed herself so much better, and showed such a disposition to be communicative, that I felt now, if ever, was the time to have my curiosity fully satisfied.

"Mr. Lester looks old and sad," I began, "and yet he lives at Morfa."

"At Morfa, but not in the old house," my mother answered. "I hope I am not superstitious, but I cannot help thinking that the new house brought a curse with it. After he thought of building that grand house, he was always striving to be grander and higher, and to live with greater people than himself. Yes, I can trace it all back to that. Three months after my poor father died, the old garden wall began to be pulled down. Ah dear! ah dear!"

"I think it was cruel," I put in hotly, "to make you stay and see it done."

"It was not done when I was there; only one little bit of the garden wall, at least. When the workpeople began to come near the house, we moved out of it. My uncle took a house for us at a place about twelve miles from Morfa, Taun y Bryn (the house under the Hill). It *was* under a hill, in a kind of hollow. We had a great green mountain behind us, and before us, the woods and rising grounds that led up to Lord Denbigh's castle, Penhammon. You have heard me

speak of it. Yes ; and it was from living near Penhammon that the intimacy between Mr. Lester and the Earl's family grew up—that intimacy that led to so much sorrow. If we had not gone to live close to their grounds, Mr. Lester would not have seen much of the Denbighs, and his plan about Lady Helen would never have taken such strong hold on his mind."

"What plan ?" I ventured to ask.

"My dear, I hardly know whether I ought to speak about it to you. It is not quite easy to make you understand ; you know so little, happily, of the way in which people of the world speak and think—of the importance which they attach to money and rank. Mr. Lester had always had plenty of money, but till he came to Morfa he had never lived in what is called good society ; and it was thought at one time a great condescension on the part of my mother's sister to marry him—indeed, she offended all her own family by doing so. The Welsh county families looked down upon Mr. Lester, and would not visit him when he first came to Morfa. So, perhaps, it was no wonder that he was pleased and proud when the Denbighs noticed him and made much of him. I can remember quite well how the friendship grew closer and closer day by day. Lady Helen and her mother returned to Penhammon from London a week or so after we settled at the cottage, and soon there was hardly a morning when their little pony carriage did not stop at our door."

"Lady Helen ! Mr. Carr's mother ? Oh, mamma, do tell me what she was like then."

"She was not pretty ; she had been overtiring herself in London, and she looked very faded and pale, when I first saw her—not a pretty sort of paleness, like Nesta's—a want of colour all over her face ; but though she was not pretty, there was something about her more taking than any prettiness. I can't describe it ; she was always saying or looking something that one did not expect. Mr. Lester was quite charmed with her ; though he was so cold and reserved to most people, he took her into his confidence at once ; and used to consult her about the designs for the new house at Morfa. I have seen her sitting for hours before a table covered with plans ; when, perhaps, she had her riding-habit on and she had said she could only stay two minutes. She used to get interested, and throw off her hat and draw little

pictures on the margins of the great drawings with her pencil ; and her face, though she had no colour, got a sort of light upon it that made one wonder as one looked. I suppose it was her great interest in the new house that made Mr. Lester wish that she should one day be its mistress—perhaps some such thought had come into her own head. I don't want to judge her, but, at all events, all that summer she was more like a daughter to Mr. Lester than a person he had only known for a few months. I found out what was passing in Mr. Lester's mind by the impatience he showed for his son to come home, and the disappointed looks that used to pass between him and my aunt when letters came from Algernon full of excuses for not coming home."

"Algernon Lester, what a pretty name ! Why did he not come home ? Where was he ?"

"He was still at college ; and in the summer, when he might have come home if he had liked, he chose to join a party of young men, who were going to travel abroad with a tutor—"

"Papa ?"

"Yes, your papa was the tutor ; I heard his name first read out in a letter of Algernon Lester's. How little I thought—Ah, my dear, my dear ! I am coming to the strange, dreadful part of my life, but it did not begin that summer. In the autumn the Denbighs left Penhammon ; I was not sorry ; for, indeed, the constant talk between them and my uncle and aunt about the new house, wearied me ; it was like hearing for ever that I was never again to have a home of my own. In the spring, after a long dull winter, my uncle and aunt went to London. I chose to stay in the country ; I might have gone with them if I had liked, but I did not like. I knew so well how it would all be ; the long talks I should have to listen to about the new house between Mr. Lester and Lady Helen, and the bitter speeches my aunt would make to every one who came, about my low spirits, and want of proper gratitude towards her and my uncle ; I thought it better to be alone than to hear such things as these, so I had that one more spring in the country. I have often been glad about it since ; I saw the leaves come out, and pass through all their different shades of green ; I watched the spring flowers, and heard the birds sing their first songs in the Penhammon woods ; till at last the full

summer came—that silent, still part of the summer, when the leaves have left off growing, and the young birds have flown from their nests, and the old ones ceased singing to them. Then I had other things to do and think of, besides watching the changes of the country. But I must not run on too fast; I am forgetting to mention one very important thing that happened in the spring. Algernon Lester spent his Easter in London, and was introduced at last to Lady Helen Vane. I don't think they could have cared much for each other, they were so unlike in every way; but somehow or other (it was Mr. Lester's influence with them both, perhaps), before Algernon went back to college at the end of the vacation, he and Lady Helen were engaged. My uncle wrote the news to me. I did not get many letters from him, but this one, I remember, was a very kind and joyful one; he seemed to take it for granted that I should be glad, and that the marriage would be a joyful thing for every one. I believe, dear, now, that if I could have sympathized with my uncle and aunt in their projects and their joys, if I had been unselfish enough, it would have been better for us all, but I could not, my heart was too sore and lonely. Their rejoicing was all strange to me, 'like a song in the night,' as it says somewhere in the Bible. In July they all came home, the Lesters and your father, who was still preparing Algernon for the examination he had to pass in the autumn. I had had many letters from my aunt, sometimes saying they were coming the next day, and then putting it off again. The delay made me nervous, and on the day they did come, I felt as if the bustle of their arrival and the sight of their gay spirits was more than I could bear. Every little thing hurt me, and when my aunt, during dinner, found fault with something I had done, I lost my self-control and burst into tears! My aunt told me, when we got upstairs, that I did it to attract attention and make people pity me; but she was mistaken—it had never come into my head that any one would pity me, or that I should attract attention."

"But you did, however. I see now what the story is going to be. Your cousin Algernon pitied you, and liked you better than Lady Helen. Oh! do go on."

"Janet, you are too forward in thinking of such things; but perhaps, as this is true, and no story, it may not do you

any harm to hear it. It brought no pleasure to me, dear, and if I could have helped it I would not have been the cause of all the anger that came into the house, and of the destruction of their happy plans. Indeed, I was such a child then, that I should never have noticed my cousin Algernon's preference for me, if my aunt's upbraiding and Lady Helen's jealousy and anger had not forced the knowledge upon me. It was a dreadful time. I have no courage to stand up against angry or passionate words. My cousin frightened me when he spoke to me. It all seemed so wrong. My uncle said he would be just, and leave us all to find out our own wishes ; but I could see such a cloud of deep displeasure upon his face, that I shrank from him. There was only one person that I could talk to, about my troubles, and he was always just and kind, and ready to shelter me from other people's cruelty or impetuosity. That was your father, Janet. You hardly know him as he was then ; nobody does, I suppose, except me. Well, one day, when things had been going on very badly with me, and when he had heard my aunt upbraiding me cruelly—he asked me to be his wife—not in the strange, wild, frightening way that Algernon used to speak to me in, but so gentle, so nobly, telling me at the same time of his father and his mother and his sister, who would be ready to love me and take me into their home. I was very little better than a child then ; I hardly knew what it was to be a wife ; but the thought of having a father and mother again won me at once—it sounded so safe. We settled that it was to be so, and Mr. Scott spoke to my uncle and aunt. I don't know all that passed between them. Mr. Lester was not satisfied at first, but my aunt, who only wanted to get me out of the house, talked him over. So we were engaged with their consent, and poor Algernon left the house very angry with his father and mother, and me, and his friend, and every one.

“ A few quiet months followed. My aunt was quite kind to me, and gave me a very handsome wedding outfit—all that beautiful house-linen, among other things, that I keep for best now. In November your father came again to Tanny Bryn, and one misty morning we were married in our own old church. That was the only time that I ever went back to Morfa, and I can hardly say I saw it then, for the clouds hung so low on the sides of the hills, that I never got the

farewell look I had intended to have. Perhaps it was as well. We came to London, and lived, as you know, with Grandpapa and Grandmamma Scott, in that little house in West Street where Hilary was born."

"And you had a home again, and were very happy?" I suggested.

"Yes, I was happy, but the days seemed very long. I was not used to a town. Your father was out all day. He had to work very hard then; for, though there were none of you to be provided for, he had his father and mother to care for. Old Mr. Scott was nearly blind then, and became quite blind before he died. They were very good old people—so good that it puzzled me, for I had never been used to such talk or such a life as theirs. Your Grandmamma Scott used to manage the house. You know what a brisk person she was to the very last. I used to watch her going about, and to wish that I had as many things to do. I fancied it would make the long monotonous days pass more quickly.

"It did not please God that I should have any children for several years, and Grandmamma Scott used to pity me, and fancy it was that regret that weighed upon my spirits. I don't myself think it was; for when Hilary came at last—when at last grandmamma came smiling in her happy way to tell me that I was the mother of a strong healthy boy, I did not rejoice as I had thought I should. The recollection came upon me suddenly that my child could never have a childhood like my own—that he would grow up among houses and streets, and never see the sea, or feel the grass under his feet, or hear the sheep-bells on the mountains; and such a longing came over me, not for myself, but for him, that I hid my face in the pillow, and (it was very wicked of me, Janet) I nearly killed myself with crying. Since that hour I have always had it in my heart that Hilary should go back to Morfa."

"But, mamma, we have all been very happy in the town," I said. "I don't think it much signifies where children live. Did Lady Helen and Algernon Lester marry after all?"

"No, my dear, never. Algernon never would believe that his father and mother had behaved fairly by me. I am afraid my marriage set him more than ever against them and their wish. I never heard more of Lady Helen till Charlie mentioned her the other day. I did not like to ask after her

in my letters to my uncle and aunt, and her name never occurred in any of theirs to me. She must have been married to Mr. Carr, very soon after her engagement to Algernon was broken off, since she has a son old enough to have taken his degree at college; so I hope she was not very unhappy about it."

"Oh! you may be sure she was not," I answered, confidently. "Perhaps Mr. Carr was a very clever man—as clever as his son is now. It must have made her very happy to marry him."

"Perhaps. But, Janet, I don't know that it makes a woman so *very* happy to marry a clever man. When the time comes for you and Nesta to marry, I hope it may not be your lot to have *very* clever men. When a man's mind is full of great things which a woman can't enter into, she has to live alone in her own life, and the little every-day cares fall heavily. I suppose it must be so; but if I could choose for you and Nesta, I should like to see you marry practical, helpful men, like Hilary, who would be careful over you and over the things in the house—not that I mean to say that it is possible for any one to be better than your father."

"Oh, no, no, of course not," I interrupted, "but, mamma, tell me something more about Algernon Lester; what did he do when you and Lady Helen were both married?"

"I don't exactly know, but from what I can make out, he and his father were never reconciled till a few months before his death, which happened a year ago. The grand new house was finished at Morfa, and Mr. and Mrs. Lester went to live in it, but I am afraid they never had much pleasure there; Algernon had vowed that he would never set his foot under their roof again, and he never did—he lived chiefly abroad, spending a great deal of money, and getting into debt, and giving a great deal of trouble to all his friends. At last he married some Italian woman, whom neither his father nor his mother could approve of, or receive into the family. It broke his mother's heart—or rather, I suppose, wounded her pride so deeply, that she could not bear it. There was always more pride than heart about her. Mr. Lester, I think, really loved his son. When he heard that Algernon's wife was dead, and that he himself had fallen into bad health, he went to see him in Italy, and they spent the last four months of his life together. Algernon confided his

little daughter Rosamond to his father's care, and I believe—so Mr. Lester told us last night—that he expressed great repentance for all his rebellious conduct, and that it was a last wish of his that Mr. Lester should do all he could to make amends to your father and me, for any pain he might have caused us.”

“I wonder Mr. Lester did not come here and tell you all this at once,” I said.

“He did write something of it to your father, but he is a man to whom such a communication would be a hard task. After his son's death, he went and shut himself up at Morfa, occupying himself only with business and the improvement of his estate. I dare say he would not have come up to London for years, if the sight of Hilary's name in the newspaper had not startled him—made him reflect, he says, that he was growing old, and that what he has to do must be done at once. It seems to have made him think, too, about Rosamond's future; he had allowed her to run almost wild, scarcely ever seeing her even, for unhappily she is more like her mother than her father, and the very sight of her gives him pain, but now he has come to a sudden resolution about her education; he has determined to renew his friendship with Lady Helen Carr, to whom he says he has always clung in his heart, and ask her to befriend his poor wild grandchild, and undertake to train her into what she ought to be. She will have a high position to fill in the world, poor child, if she lives, for she will be one of the richest heiresses in England. It is a very different thing owning Morfa now, from what it was in my father's time; the mines on the estate which he ruined himself in working, yield Mr. Lester an immense income now, and are becoming more valuable every year.”

“Will Lady Helen have Rosamond to live with her, then?” I asked.

“She has invited her to pay her a visit now, and Mr. Lester hopes that Lady Helen will in future stay often at Morfa; she is a widow with only one grown up son, and not very rich, so she can do as she likes. How little I thought, when I used to hear your father praising young Carr's cleverness, and holding him up as an example to Hilary, that he was Lady Helen's son! I wonder whether he really is so clever?”

"Shall you ever see Lady Helen again, do you think?"

"Yes; I have promised Mr. Lester to call on Rosamond while she is in London: it will be a great effort to me, but I suppose it is right to make it. It is time that all past coldness and unkindness should be forgotten, and I might possibly be of use to poor Algernon's child. Lady Helen has had a son of her own to be sure, but yet I can't fancy her being very clever in the management of young people, or very kind."

"Mamma, I hope you will take us with you when you go to call; how wonderful it is that all these Morfa people should be just coming about us now!"

"It agitates me very much, for I don't know what may come of it. Now that my uncle has really come forward himself to seek a reconciliation, I don't think your father will feel it his duty to set himself against his desire to be useful to the boys, perhaps after all Hilary may—but stay, I promised your father that he should be the first to mention it. Hilary is to have his choice, and I have promised not to influence him. You must be very careful not to give him any hint till your father has spoken, Janet."

"You have not told me anything yet, mamma," I answered, hoping earnestly to draw her on.

"Have I not? Ah! that is fortunate; that is a great relief to my mind; but still you can be as careful as if I had told you."

CHAPTER VII.

"At length, Iduna, looking more narrowly at them, saw, when they turned their backs to her, that they were hollow behind: they were, in truth, Ellwomen, who have no hearts."

Norse Legend.

THE next morning, after breakfast, my father summoned Hilary and Charlie to follow him into his study, as he had something of importance to speak to them about. My father's study was a dark den at the back of the house, chiefly used as a repository for the books, which my much-enduring mother hunted out of the other rooms when the tables were so cumbered with them, that she was moved to take a strong

measure to secure a place for her work-basket. The one dusty window looked out on a blank wall, and there was no fire-place ; if it had been more habitable, my father would, I fear, have retired to it as soon as ever he entered the house, as regularly as a snail into its shell. As it was, he contrived to spend an hour or so there on most days, and we young ones regarded the place with a dim religious kind of awe, for in very early times our father had been used to take us there on great occasions, when we had been very good or very naughty. The stubbornest fit of wilfulness never survived a silent *tête-à-tête* with my father in that room. I remember trying in vain to keep up feelings of resentment or childish pride, while my father's serious face, partly turned from me, and a dim light, and a something in the look of the ponderous dusty tomes that lined the walls and usurped the floor, were filling me with a sense of my own insignificance. I must not forget to mention, however, as the most effectual instrument of my subjugation, a large ostrich egg that hung suspended by a long string from the ceiling near the window ; we none of us ever knew how it came there. From the time of my first visit to the study, I had confused and terrible ideas about that egg ; I thought it had something to do with the roc's egg in the Arabian Nights, and as it hung with the accumulated dust of several years on its upper surface, swaying gently backwards and forwards when my father's steps shook the room, I eyed it nervously, not at all sure that some unguarded word or wicked thought of mine might not precipitate it suddenly to the ground, and at the same moment bring the house about our ears. I was quite a big girl before I could touch that egg with complete indifference.

It was now some years since any one of us had been summoned to the study, and therefore when Hilary and Charlie remained for the greater part of the morning, closeted with our father, Nesta and I were not a little anxious to hear the result of the conference. They emerged from the study at dinner-time, but Hilary's face looked so grave, and Charlie's so stormy, that we dared not ask any questions, and had to put up with a very silent dinner-hour. Charlie went out for a moody solitary walk in the afternoon. Hilary was occupied writing letters at my father's dictation. I had to wait till the twilight, when I managed to lure Hilary into the old garret with me, before my curiosity was satisfied.

Then I learned that in spite of his grave looks, Hilary was pleased with the news he had heard that morning. My father had informed him that he had abandoned all intention of sending him to college, and had accepted a proposition made to him by Mr. Lester, that Hilary should spend a year or two at Morfa, in the house of Mr. Lester's land-agent, learning farming and land-surveying from him, and making himself acquainted with the management of the Morfa estate. Hilary had always had a secret wish to emigrate, and the prospect of entering on this new line of life attracted him because he thought it afforded him the best chance he was likely to have of preparing himself to carry out this wish at some future day. I could not share his pleasure in this prospect.

"Mamma will never consent to your leaving England," I said, decidedly. "What does she think of Mr. Lester's plan?"

"She is very happy about it. She likes the idea of my living at Morfa, and she has no other thought but that I shall always stay there, and succeed this Mr. Williams in the management of the estate. I really believe, Janet, that would be almost as good to her as our getting Morfa back for our own."

"But not to you."

"No, not to me. I am afraid I should not like to remain all my life another man's servant. I don't know that it would give the place any additional charm to me that it *had* belonged to my ancestors. I had rather make a place for myself, and begin a new family in a new world. Why not? I suppose those old Wynnes had a beginning at Morfa some time. However, say nothing of all this to my mother. The thought of my settling at Morfa pleases her, and will reconcile her to parting with us both."

"Both! Is Charlie going at once to college then?"

"No, my father thinks him not sufficiently well prepared, and as he must leave the school after gaining the scholarship, my father is going to send him to read with a tutor for a year or so first. He can afford to do that now I am taken off his hands."

"Oh, that accounts for Charlie's looking so savage then?"

"Yes, it is a great disappointment to him; he had so set his heart on going to college at once. I must say I wish the next few weeks were over. Charlie will be horribly out of

temper, and my mother will dread the parting more and more every day as it comes nearer."

So should I; but as Hilary did not seem to think of that, I said nothing about it. The parting could not be the same to the boys, who were going out into the world, as to us who were to stay at home.

The next fortnight, certainly, was a dreary time. My mother was actively engaged all day in repairing and replenishing the boys' wardrobes. Her hands were seldom still, except when Hilary was in the room, and then they were very apt to fall listlessly on her lap, while her eyes followed him about, or to remain steadfastly fixed on his face, when he was sitting still. One exciting event occurred, however, which, by changing the current of our thoughts, was serviceable to us all. After many changes of purpose, my mother fixed a day for going to see Rosamond Lester at Lady Helen Carr's house. It had been settled from the first that Charlie and Nesta were to accompany my mother on this occasion. Charlie, because there would have been no peace for any one if he had been left at home, and Nesta, because my mother said she never made her nervous as I did. I was generally glad enough that Nesta should take my place when our mother visited her friends, but my curiosity about the Carrs made me regret for once the effect my presence produced on my mother's visiting nerves.

Nesta took my disappointment and the preference shown to herself very much to heart. Her sweet face looked so wistful when she came down, dressed, into the hall, that my father, who happened to be just turning into his den, noticed it, and paused, with a book under each arm, to observe us.

"What is the matter with Charlie?" he asked, as the result of the scrutinizing glance he cast from one to another.

There was nothing the matter with Charlie but a new necktie, with a crimson stripe in it and fringed ends. My father, who was usually supposed not to know one article of dress from another, showed great curiosity about this, looking at it closely, and even touching it—while Charlie's cheeks rivalled the colour of the silk—and apologizing, finally, by remarking that it struck him, because he thought he had seen a thing like it before in a hairdresser's shop. Then turning round, he remarked, "Nesta looks pale. You do right to take her

for a drive. But how is it that you are not ready, Janet? You ought not to keep your mother waiting."

"Janet is not going," interposed my mother, rather nervously.

"Why not?" (in a low voice) "Janet is the elder."

"Yes, I know; but indeed, my dear, it is easy enough for you to say Janet is the elder, but if you did but understand the state my nerves are in, and the trial it is to me to see Janet's bonnet-strings, you would be more considerate. It is quite too much for me to have to think of Janet's dress, while I am paying a visit."

"Janet is old enough to think of her own dress, and she will never learn to do it, if you don't accustom her to go out with you. She wore a bonnet on Sunday, I believe; if it was fit to wear at church, it is fit for Lady Helen Carr to see. Janet, go and put on your bonnet."

I ran upstairs joyfully, but not without some misgivings, which were happily relieved when I found that Nesta's forethought had taken in the possibility of my mother's relenting towards me. My Sunday bonnet astonished me by coming fresh out of the handbox. Nesta had transferred the carefully kept ribbons from her bonnet to mine, secure that her own skilful tying would suffice to make my rumpled ones look respectable when they met under her chin. She looked triumphant when I came down in ten minutes, and really seemed to think I deserved the praise my father bestowed on my despatch.

We had a long drive, for the house where Lady Helen resided when in London was situated in a distant suburb. A very dilapidated melancholy house it looked to us when we reached it. We had to ring several times before our summons was attended to, and then to wait for fully ten minutes in a cold dusty hall till the servant reappeared with the intelligence that Lady Helen Carr was at home and could see us. We followed him up a flight of shabbily carpeted stairs, and were ushered into a small morning room, where a bright wood fire was burning. Before it stood a well-cushioned sofa, from which a lady was in the act of rising when we entered. I concluded that this was Lady Helen Carr, though she was sufficiently unlike the vision I had formed of her, to cause me a certain surprise. She looked much older than I had expected, and less imposing. I cannot describe her face,

often as I have studied it since. It had no claim to be considered a beautiful, or even a pleasant face, though the broad smooth forehead, just edged with a line of soft brown hair, the penetrating grey eyes, and expressive mouth, where "little smiles went out and in," made it one not easy to overlook or forget. She came forward to my mother holding out both hands, and led her to the sofa without speaking; even after they were seated, side by side, a moment's silence followed. Lady Helen spoke first. Bending her head slowly forward, and pressing the two hands she still held, she said, softly,

"How long it is since we two last met! During your last summer at Tann y Bryn, was it not? Let me see; how long ago?"

My mother was not prepared for such a sudden reference to events of which, she at least, had not outlived the pain; a sudden rush of blood crimsoned her fair face, her lip trembled, and her eyes, raised to Lady Helen's face, filled with tears. I thought her silence and confusion would embarrass Lady Helen, but it was not so; she returned my mother's glance, and her own eyes grew small and intensely bright, and one of the "little smiles" flickered in and out on her thin lips. It was a curious look; such as I have seen on the face of a school-boy as he watches with interest, and not the least sympathy, the contortions of a butterfly through whose body he has stuck a pin. It came and went in an instant; Lady Helen released my mother's hands, and completed her sentence in a now really gracious and cordial manner.

"Long, yes, *I* may call it long; but when I look at you, I begin to fancy that I am mistaken, and that I have been counting days for years. You are not altered; you hardly look a day older than when I last saw you. I wish you would give me your secret; I wish you could explain to me how you have managed to live so many years in the world and to look just the same beautiful child that you were when we first met."

My mother had recovered herself now, and at the words "beautiful child" she drew up her head, and glanced at us with a little gesture of offended maternal dignity.

"I have brought my children to see you, Lady Helen," she said.

"Your children ! Well, then, I am right in my chronology after all. Is this indeed your daughter ? She looks older than you do."

"Yes, that is Janet, my eldest daughter. My eldest child is a son, Hilary Wynne, named after my dear father ; he is eighteen. That is my second son Charlie, over sixteen ; and that is Ernestine, my youngest."

Charlie and Ernestine, who had been standing a little behind me, now came forward. Lady Helen looked from one to another with undisguised admiration ; a faint flush of colour came into her sallow cheek, and the little smile with which she turned to my mother did not hide a shade of vexation, if not of sadness.

"Ah ! you have some malice in you after all," she said. "You know what an absurd adoration I have always had for beauty, and you rouse all the envy in my nature, by bringing me such a sight as this. No, my dear Mrs. Scott, you need not shake your head. I always say exactly what I think of people's looks. If Miss Ernestine (is not that the name ?) has not got hardened yet into being called a beauty, it is high time that I should begin the process. See ! she does not colour even. What a self-possessed, well-bred lady of the world she is ! Both your daughters are older than you, Mrs. Scott. They leave consciousness and blushes to the young gentleman."

Ernestine did not colour ; it was not her habit to colour under observation ; she grew pale and shrank into herself, hiding away her charms—the pretty blushes, and quick bright glances and smiles that came when no one was watching for them, as a sensitive plant folds inwards the bright side of its delicate leaves. I was not surprised that Lady Helen's eye turned from her face to Charlie's, and rested there.

"Is your eldest son like this one ?" she asked.

"No, Hilary and Charlie are never considered alike. I think Hilary is most like Janet."

This second mention of my name brought on me a more considering look than I had yet undergone. Lady Helen's lips did not say "What a pity !" but only the words were wanting. "A sensible face," she remarked to my mother, speaking of me as if I had been a picture, or deaf and dumb. "Well, we cannot all be alike, and a sensible, well-informed, useful girl is always liked and valued."

"H'm!" said my mother, "but unfortunately it is Ernestine who is the most useful; she is the sensible one."

"Oh, that will never do! My dear Mrs. Scott, daughterless as I am, you will have to come to me to be instructed. I assure you, you must be decided about your eldest daughter's line; there is no other for her to take, and you must not let her be deprived of it. She must not attempt to be witty and *spirituelle*; she is too large, and does not move easily enough. She and I will talk it over together some day. If people only would make up their minds about themselves, and act consistently, there is really hardly any one who might not be made something of."

The last remark was not addressed to any one, and my mother not being much pleased with the turn the conversation had taken, introduced a fresh topic. "You have a son older than either of mine, I have heard?" she said.

"Older indeed! but, my dear Mrs. Scott, you are touching on a tender subject. I do not consider myself young—I neither look young nor feel young; but really when I look at my son, and hear him and his friends converse together, I am inclined to revolt against the antiquity they thrust upon me. For the last ten years, I assure you, I have felt it necessary to pay greater respect to my son, on account of his age, than I ever paid my father. He is *wonderfully* old, and he has convinced me that it is only the young people of this generation who know how to be old."

"Your son is very clever, is he not?" my mother gently interposed.

"Some people, himself among the number, think so. He is not with me now, and if he were, I don't think I should send for him for you to look at; he does not bear looking at as well as your children do. Stay though! I may as well prepare you for what you will have to see some day; that is his likeness above the chimney-piece; it will give you a good idea of what he is. Ugly *sans façon*! It is my style of ugliness, you will observe, that he has inherited, not his father's; I am rather glad of that, for it is the less common style of the two. Shafto and I comfort ourselves sometimes by observing that at all events we have it to ourselves."

We all turned to look at the picture Lady Helen pointed out; it was a full-length portrait, and it impressed you at once with a conviction that it must be a perfect likeness;

the attitude was so easy, the expression of the face so individual and striking. There was enough likeness in the face to Lady Helen's to justify her remark ; there was the same colourless complexion, the same heavy droop of the eyelids, the same want of regularity of feature ; yet as I gazed from one to the other, I felt that I liked the pictured face the best. It was an old-young face ; perhaps it was the contrast between the smooth cheek and brow, and the grave, almost melancholy expression of eyes, that interested me.

"Well !" said Lady Helen, turning with a playful smile to my mother, "where is your look of triumph over me ? I know you must be feeling triumphant ; only one child against your four, and such an ugly one ! cannot you think of something comforting to say to me ?—you always were a kind creature."

"I am sure," answered my mother, hesitatingly, "I never thought of being proud ; I have always said that I did not care at all about looks, and your son's seems to be a very nice—"

"No, my dear Mrs. Scott—pardon me, but I cannot have that said—not a *nice face* : Shafto and I stand upon our ugliness ; we really cannot give up that. If we could have been beautiful, well ; if not, to be downright ugly is still something, but to be tolerable looking, *nice-looking*, no ! I will stand up for Shafto ; he does not deserve such a reproach as that. I have handed him down the Denbigh face unmitigated, sneer and all, and I think the artist has done it justice."

My mother, utterly discomfited, escaped answering this remark by asking to see Rosamond Lester, who had not yet made her appearance. Lady Helen glanced round the room, and seeing no one, remarked, "Ah ! she has slipped away again, probably the instant you were announced ; she is an extraordinarily unsociable child, I can make nothing of her. I believe she positively hates me, and that it is pain to her to be in the same room with me, yet I do all I can to please her, for my kind friend, Mr. Lester's sake. She has been sadly neglected. She puts me in mind of German stories of wild children, who have been lost in forests in their infancy, and grown up among wild beasts. I begin to repent that I have undertaken the task of training her. I should like you to see her, however, for I want your opinion of her state of

health ; you know more about children than I do. If you will come with me, we will take her by storm in her retreat upstairs." Lady Helen rose from her seat as she spoke, and my mother followed her to the door ; when they reached it she turned and looked at us.

"Will you not come too ? it will perhaps interest her to see other children."

Nesta and I complied ; Charlie turned to the table, and took up a book. Lady Helen, drawing a shawl over her rather high thin shoulders, made a remark about the coldness of the passages, and her extreme dislike to every part of the house but her own snugery, as she led us up a second wide flight of stairs. My mother's eyes, glancing here and there, were observant, as I plainly perceived, of dust and cobwebs.

"Here we are," Lady Helen said, at last, throwing open the door of a room, and entering quickly. "Rosamond, I have brought you some visitors."

It was a large, low room, with old nursery furniture in it. A table in the middle was loaded with books and toys ; they looked as if they had been just thrown down upon it and left. The window was wide open, and kneeling before it was Rosamond Lester. Her hands, stretched above her head, held the uppermost of a row of iron bars which protected the window, and her face was pressed between the two middle ones, which just caught her forehead and chin.

"Rosamond, my dear child, I have brought some friends to see you," Lady Helen repeated, in a voice which, in spite of its gentleness, expressed abundant disgust and vexation. No answer came, and with a shrug of her shoulders she walked up to the table. "You see what pains I take to please her," she said, touching the toys and books. "Look round, Miss Ernestine, and tell me whether you do not think there is employment and amusement here for a girl of her age, more satisfactory than rebelling against the bars of that unfortunate window."

Nesta looked as she was told, and then said timidly, "I think" (glancing pitifully at the figure in the window)—"I think she is too old to care for toys or books like these."

"You do ? I am glad you have told me so. I feel at a loss to know what girls do care for, for I believe I never was like other girls myself. Think over all your occupations, and tell me what gives you most pleasure."

Nesta hesitated, and Lady Helen added a "Well, my dear?" with a look that reminded me of Charlie's saying about Mr. Carr's eyes drawing the answers out of him.

"Hearing Janet talk," said Nesta, at last.

"Ah," interposed my mother, "living in a town, as we do, without a garden, or so much as a tree near us, the poor child has no pleasures."

"Oh, I have Janet," said Nesta.

"So you can suggest nothing but Janet? Well, perhaps, companionship may be what Rosamond wants. I wish I had thought of that before she became so heavy and languid. Mrs. Scott, do you think you could spare me your daughters for a week or so, till the governess I have engaged for Rosamond arrives, or till we return to Morfa? I would do my best to make them happy, and Mr. Lester would be very grateful to you."

Before my mother could answer, a gruff voice from the other end of the room interrupted our talk. Rosamond had risen from her knees, and partly turned round, though with one hand still nervously clutching the bars of the window. "I don't want them," she said; "don't bring them here. I won't speak to them if they do come."

"There! you see how strange she is!" exclaimed Lady Helen—"so wilfully unsociable. Nothing I propose to do pleases her. What shall I do with her?"

I did not hear my mother's whispered answer. The next instant she had crossed the room to the window, succeeded in unclasping Rosamond's hand from the bar, and in persuading her to take a chair near one in which she placed herself. Then she began to talk to her, asking minute questions about well-remembered and well-loved spots in the neighbourhood of Morfa; the sheltered wood behind the house, where the first violets came out; the low meadow famous for mushrooms, the wide common, where cranberries might sometimes be gathered. Rosamond stood still to listen, then raised her eyes confidently to my mother's face—at last vouchsafed a word or two of answer. "Yes, she had walked through that wood; she knew the common, and one day she had found some sour red berries growing on a low bush. If she had known that my mother cared so much for them, she would have looked for some for her." Her face grew quite gentle as she said this, and she nestled close up to my mother's

side. I fancied Lady Helen was not quite pleased to see how easily my mother won Rosamond's confidence. She interrupted the conversation rather sharply once or twice, and when my mother, on rising to take leave, invited Rosamond to come and spend a day with us, she demurred about accepting the invitation. "My mother was too kind," she said; "but she did not know—she was not fond of making promises. If she had a day to spare before she left London she would bring her to see us, but she was disposed to think she should not remain many days longer in London. She should perhaps write to Mr. Lester that afternoon, and fix the time for her visit to Morfa."

When the last "good-byes" came to be spoken, however, Lady Helen grew gracious again. She even followed us downstairs, with kind pretty speeches to Nesta and Charlie, and cordially expressed hopes that she and my mother should, somehow or other, somewhere, meet again.

"Which is the *real* Lady Helen, mamma?" I asked, when we had taken our places in the carriage; "which is the Lady Helen who used to sit in the little summer parlour at Tann y Bryn, and talk to Mr. Lester—the smiling one, or the sneering one? If you had much of the sneering one, I don't wonder at your cousin Algernon——"

"Janet, how can you?" my mother cried. "I am sure the way in which you talk is a lesson against ever telling you anything again."

I subsided immediately, but in spite of my discomfiture we had plenty of talk during our ride home. Charlie had much to say about the number of books he had discovered, in various parts of the room, while we were upstairs, and my mother was much shocked and scandalized by his description of their expensive bindings. "She could not conceive," she said, "how a woman, who might do just as she liked with her money, could be so lost to all womanly feeling as to spend it in buying useless books, while all the furniture in her house was in such an unsatisfactory state."

My mother had caught her foot in a large hole in the stair-carpet, she informed us, and counted five ink-stains on the cloth that covered the table. Well, it was a lesson. No station was without its trials, and there might be unexpected ones everywhere. Lady Helen's present home was a greater contrast to Denbigh Castle than our little house to Morfa.

"Were the Denbighs rich?" I asked.

My mother said she believed not; she remembered to have heard that Lord Denbigh's son had been very extravagant, and that the daughters were slenderly portioned.

"But that would have made no difference in Mr. Lester's wishes. Oh, dear!" cried my mother, suddenly; "to think that she *might* have had that great house at Morfa now. What a contrast! I wish I dare have said something to her about being sorry. Janet, please do not repeat what you said just now, about her sneering; and I think, children, it would perhaps be considerate in us if we never mentioned the state of her stair-carpet to any one. I certainly shall not tell Mrs. Wilton, though she will, I have no doubt, come in this afternoon to hear all about our visit; and she would be very much surprised, indeed, if I did mention it to her."

My mother kept her resolution, and was guarded in her narrative of our visit, even to my father and Hilary, but we younger ones supplied all the missing details. I fancy that my father was quite weary of the subject before the day was over; for he checked Charlie and me rather impatiently, in a dispute we were carrying on during supper, about a resemblance, on which I insisted, between Lady Helen and Christabel's mysterious guest.

"He would not have any more nonsense talked," he said. "Charlie's and my arguments were a nuisance to the whole family; it was perhaps as well that we should not have opportunity for many more."

That was in fact the last of our arguments, for, very soon after, came a letter from Mr. Williams, fixing an early day for Hilary's arrival at Morfa. And as Charlie's future tutor lived in Shropshire; it was settled that the two boys should leave us on the same day, and make the greater part of their journey together.

My mother's habit of never leaving anything to be done at the last, stood her in good stead. Yet when the last day came, it seemed as if we had everything to do. My mother kept all her tears till the bustle was over; Nesta and I were obliged to let her work, and to weary ourselves by standing about, watching her; for she would have felt aggrieved, if any of the last offices performed for the boys had been rendered by any hands but hers.

She was downstairs first on the morning of departure; and

care about providing thoroughly hot coffee and toast occupied her to the last moment. Hilary eat and drank, and helped my mother dexterously with the tea-urn, just as he had done every other morning of his life. Charlie, who had hitherto betrayed what Nesta considered stony-hearted indifference about the approaching separation, broke down utterly just at the last; he came downstairs pale-faced and red-eyed, choked desperately over every morsel of toast, and could hardly bring himself to stir from my father's side. When the cab came to the door he missed his keys, and we all had a frantic search for them up and down the house. This accident curtailed some last words of counsel that my father had wished to give, but it also shortened my mother's clinging painful embrace of Hilary; and that was perhaps as well for both of them.

At last they were gone; the rattle of the cab-wheels died away along the street, and silence seemed to come down upon the whole house. We four who were left in it, sat looking blankly at each other for some minutes, and then my father walked off and shut himself up in his den; and my mother, after putting the breakfast-cups together for the servant to take away, retired also to her room, where we heard her lock herself in. Nesta and I got our work, and sat in the window seat; we had a solemn sort of feeling upon us, as if it were Sunday, and we spoke in whispers. We understood why our father and mother had shut themselves up. The objects of their constant daily care and thought were speeding away, out of the reach of the wise guidance of the one—the tender watching of the other: what could they do, but send out their hearts after them in petitions to Heaven for their welfare?

I have often thought how strange it would be, if some sudden spiritualizing of our powers of vision could enable us to see the wishes, hopes, cares, anxiety, love, that wait on each person in a company—if they took the form of robes of various degrees of richness and beauty, for instance—how suddenly we might have to change our estimates of a person's importance and worth. This is an idle fancy, but I remember it came to me on that morning, as I thought of my brothers taking their first flight out of the family ark, which was never again to be their only home; and of my father and mother shut up with anxious hearts, praying for them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"And we wake to a whisper, self-murmured and fond,
Oh Life! oh Beyond!
Thou art strange, thou art sweet!"

E. B. BROWNING.

LOOKING at my life as a journey, my next four years appear to me to have been spent in a narrow, shady, upward-sloping green lane, pleasant to look down, when one has reached the top, but somewhat monotonous to linger long in. We were a very quiet little household when the boys had left us; we ought to have been a very happy one; and I take shame to my own restless disposition that I was not entirely contented and happy.

I must confess that I had a somewhat turbulent and uncomfortable passage from girlhood to womanhood. I quarrelled with my teachers, argued with my companions, and, I fear, made myself generally disagreeable in the house. My dear mother used to be in despair about me sometimes, and would even now and then terrify me by giving it as her opinion that I never should be like other people, and that she did not see what was to become of me. Only my father had patience with me, and encouraged me not to despair of myself. It was an uncomfortable and painful growing up; but the days and months passed, and the process went on.

On my eighteenth birthday I remember I felt very old. I thought I had gone through a great deal, and been disabused of many illusions, and I also hoped that I had succeeded in curing myself of my most obvious faults; my mother had begun to consider me more trustworthy, and my father had ceased to be anxious about what I might say in company. I had learned not to startle old gentlemen and young ladies, by abruptly asking their opinion about free-will or the origin of evil; and I had left off forcing my intimate friends to enter upon long-winded discussions at inconvenient times.

For the last three months Mr. Armstrong (Hilary's old friend), who had been at one time my most constant opponent in the recondite arguments I was fond of starting, had found it difficult to draw me into one, even when he had felt disposed to enter upon the old amusement. Now that I was

really a grown-up woman, I promised myself that neither he nor any one else should entertain themselves at my expense.

When I had finished dressing on that morning, I lingered for a minute before the glass, and congratulated myself that, in spite of my mother's predictions that I should never be like other people, there was, at least, no Cain-mark of separation on my face. I had no pretension to beauty, or even to prettiness, but I could not help thinking with some satisfaction, that I looked at least as well as most people, perhaps even a little better than some. My teeth had justified my father's wisdom in forbidding any interference with them, by falling into their right places of their own accord. Being very white and even, they somewhat atoned for the large size of my mouth, over which I had heard my mother lament. My complexion was as dark as ever, but sometimes my cheeks assumed a tinge of colour, and then Nesta would triumphantly declare that I looked quite handsome; I did not believe this, but I did not contradict her, for she found a marvellous satisfaction in the saying.

Just as I had finished my inspection of myself, and turned from the glass to the door, Nesta entered with a bunch of spring flowers in her hand, to buy which she had been out in the chill March morning.

"Oh! I am so glad you have not gone downstairs yet," she said, "I wanted to be the first to speak to you this morning; I have always been the first to speak to you on your birthday morning, and I always mean to be." Coming up to me, she threw her arms round my neck, and looked up at me with the fond admiring look in her brown eyes, which I had been used to see so long, that it came almost as due homage to me from my little sister.

Nesta had not grown up quite as beautiful as she had promised to be in her childhood; at seventeen she was still extremely small, and childish looking; her cheeks were still almost transparently pale; her small delicately formed mouth wore often a dejected expression; her long dark eye-lashes still seemed too heavy for the white lids to hold up. She looked like a very rare and precious flower, that had failed to expand all its charms for want of due warmth and sunlight. Now and then, however, a temporary transformation would take place in her, and she would become for an hour or two wonderfully beautiful. I had noticed this change

come over her sometimes, when she was singing alone in the room with me, but it came oftenest, and lasted longest, when Charlie was at home ; then a spirit of frolic seemed to take possession of Nesta, and her usual tender seriousness gave place to a kind of airy gaiety. I never could follow either her or Charlie when they were in their happiest moods ; their catch words were unintelligible to me, their playfulness unmeaning. My father used to smile, and even laugh, aloud, at their vagaries, while I knit my brows in bewilderment.

"You are not old enough to enter into this, Janet," he used to say to me compassionately, when he saw how disconcerted I was ; "but never mind, you will work your way into the play spirit some day, as you are not born to it ; you will have to wait to be young till you are old."

When Nesta had admired me to her heart's content, she amused herself by arranging the flowers she had brought in my hair.

"You have grown in this last year, Janet," she said, "more than I have ; I had not to stand on tiptoe last year, when I put a bunch of birthday flowers in your hair. Do turn to the glass, and see how pretty the white snowdrops and the blue nemophilæ look in your dear brown hair—they are you and me ; I am the snowdrops, and you are the blue. Nay ! don't twitch your head away ; I was not meaning what you are thinking just now ; I had forgotten how odious Mrs. Wilton has made that word to you, with her eternal 'So I understand that you are becoming quite a blue, Miss Janet ; we are all afraid of you.'"

Nesta had the power of giving the precise accent and tone of any one whose words she repeated. I always declared that there was nothing really laughable in this, but I never could help laughing when Mrs. Wilton's obnoxious voice and words came from Nesta's lips.

"Now you are to stand still," Nesta continued, "I want to try this belt round your waist ; it is the one Rosamond Lester made Hilary send to us for a pattern. Ah ! it is too large for you. You see your waist is more slender than Rosamond Lester's, and yet every one says what a lovely figure she has."

"Fine, not lovely," I corrected.

"Janet, you must help me to persuade mamma to go with us to-day, and choose the ribbons Rosamond wants. Hilary

does not like us to be long executing a commission for Miss Lester."

How strange it is in her to trouble Hilary with such foolish little commissions," I remarked.

"Shall I tell you what I feel sure is always happening at Morfa, when Rosamond sends us a commission?"

"How can you know what is happening at Morfa?"

"I know that Lady Helen Carr is staying there, and that she and Rosamond have had a quarrel."

"But, my dear, why should Rosamond's quarrelling with Lady Helen Carr make her want ribbons?"

"It does not, O stupid Janet; but if you had listened to the letters Charlie wrote from Morfa last Christmas as attentively as I did, you would understand my hint. Did not you learn from them that Lady Helen Carr hates Hilary, and that Rosamond knows no better way of plaguing her than by making an unusually open display of her intimacy with him?"

"That is one of Charlie's fancies," I answered. "He always will insist on knowing more of people's likes and dislikes than they know themselves. Hilary has far too much dignity to allow himself to be made a subject of quarrel."

"Yes, if he knew that people were quarrelling about him; but, Janet, don't you know Hilary? All sorts of manoeuvres and petty quarrels might pass before his eyes without his seeing them. He will tell you what kind of earth there is on every field for twenty miles round Morfa, but I don't believe he knows that his cousin Rosamond has changed from a little girl to a grown-up young lady. He has so much to say about the country that he quite forgets the people who live in it."

"His descriptions of the country are what mamma delights in," I observed. "There is sure to be a letter from him to-day. Let us go downstairs and get it."

I paused on my way to the breakfast-room, to tap at the little study-door, and summon my father. I now usually found him at this hour pacing up and down the narrow space between the writing-desk and the rows of dusty volumes which occupied half the floor. The lapse of a few years does not alter middle-aged people as it alters the young. Yet the last four years had wrought one very noticeable change in my father—a change which indifferent persons could not fail to perceive, but which we, who lived with him, only acknow-

ledged with sudden pangs of misgiving now and then. A certain expression that we had been used to see at times in his eyes, had become fixed there. I don't know how to describe it; I never saw it in any eyes but his. It was an inward look—a look of rest; there was none of the old quick glancings up and down—the painful efforts to see, which in past times had somewhat disfigured his countenance. The eyelids, now always well opened and still, showed fully the calm expression of the beautiful brown irids. My mind misgave me that this expression of inward calm remained so fixed in them, because every day a less vivid perception of outward things disturbed it. My father, however, had never said a word to any one about any failure of sight, and excepting that he read and wrote less, and was more and more thankful for the support of Mr. Armstrong's arm to and from the school, there was little alteration in his daily habits. I don't think my mother ever felt at all uneasy about him.

When my father and I entered the breakfast-room together, we found Nesta making the tea, and my mother sitting by the fire, in a high state of enjoyment; for she held a closely-written sheet of paper in her hand, and two others lay on the mantel-shelf beside her. No one but Hilary ever wrote such letters. My mother lived through them a sort of double life—half with Hilary at Morfa, only half in London with us. She knew his hours of walking, the routine of his rides; she knew what crops were growing on the lowland meadows, and the names of the farmers who rented the steep pasturage of the mountain sides; she was interested in the well-being of the flocks that fed there. She recollected every lone cottage among the hills that Hilary described himself as visiting, and was eager for details of their present inhabitants. Every name recalled some incident of her early happy days.

She cut short her birthday greeting to me to claim our interest in what she had been reading. "Oh, Janet," she said, "think of Mr. Lester's wanting to pull down the old farmhouse at Cae-Mawr, and to build a new brick house further from the lake. He thinks the present situation damp I suppose. I can't make out from this letter what Hilary's opinion is. I fancy he is disposed to have the old house put into repair, and the land drained. I hope Mr. Lester will decide on doing this. I could not bear to lose the old house. There used to be such a pear-tree growing over the south gable, and

I have gathered monthly roses from the porch in January. I must write to Hilary to-day about it."

"Does Hilary say how Mr. Williams is?" my father asked.

"No better. Hilary begins to think he will never recover from the effects of his fall last autumn. His illness throws a great deal of work on Hilary. He is really doing all the agent's work, with a very small share of the pay."

"Nay!" my father answered; "Mr. Lester has been very liberal. Hilary would not be in the position he holds, if he were not acting as Mr. Williams' substitute."

"I believe Mr. Lester has more confidence in Hilary than he ever had in Mr. Williams," I remarked proudly. "Charlie says Mr. Lester never settles anything now without asking Hilary's opinion first."

"Well, well," said my father impatiently, "so long as Hilary's head is not turned."

"Oh! papa," I answered laughing, "anxiety about Hilary's head is quite thrown away; I don't believe he is ever in a hurry even. Look at his letters; there are three to-day—mamma's long letter, and shorter ones for Nesta and me."

I had been turning over a heap of still unopened letters as I spoke: there were four—two directed in Hilary's handwriting, one from Lady Helen Carr, the third had its face turned to the table; my father took it up, and held it close to his eyes. "Is not this from Charlie?" he said rather quickly; "open it, Janet. Did you know that there was a letter from Charlie, my dear?" (to my mother).

"Yes, I saw it, but I put it aside till I had read Hilary's. Charlie's letters are always so short and unsatisfactory. You had better read it aloud now, Janet."

Comparisons between Charlie's and Hilary's letters were always painful. My first glance showed me that the letter I held was no longer than the majority of its predecessors, and expecting a string of common-place excuses for not writing, I prepared myself reluctantly to read.

"There can be no news about the scholarship yet," my father remarked, "for the examination was not to begin till yesterday; but perhaps he will tell us how he got through the first day's trial. Let us hear, Janet."

"Dearest Mother," I read, "'will you be glad to hear that I am coming home to-morrow evening? I know you

don't like surprises, but, as the letters reach you early, and as I shall not be in London till ten o'clock at night, I think the intervening hours will be time enough for you and Nesta to tire yourselves in making ready for me. Give my love to my father, and tell him that I hope he won't be disappointed to hear that I have given up all thought of trying for the Craven scholarship. I did not go into the schools to-day. I will explain my reason for this change of purpose when we meet. Love to the girls.—Your affectionate CHARLIE.

"P.S. I have not been very well lately, but what has determined me against going in for the scholarship is that one of the examiners is a detestable old fogey to whom I have a special aversion. The fact of having to be examined by him would have entirely prevented my doing myself justice."

"Not going to try for the scholarship!" cried my father.

"Coming home to-night, without giving us time to air his bed!" exclaimed my mother, and then an ominous silence fell on the group assembled round the breakfast-table. Once or twice before, Charlie's short letters had brought down such silences. My mother, refusing all Nesta's pressing offers of tea and toast, sat looking at my father. My father took his breakfast as usual, but his face settled into the stern gravity which we used to call the "school look," and the veins in his large forehead swelled till I could trace the course of each throbbing blue line. No one spoke till the meal was over and my father rose to leave the room; then my mother took up Charlie's letter, and glancing down it, remarked in a faltering voice, "He says he has not been very well lately."

My father, who had reached the door, turned back and stood behind my mother's chair.

"We shall be glad to see poor Charlie," she continued. "It is more than a year since we have seen him. I don't think we need make any difficulty about the bed; I always keep the beds well-aired, and I will have a fire lighted in his room directly."

It was in the same tone of voice, and with gentle irrelevant remarks of the same nature, that my mother had been wont to try in old times to avert my father's displeasure when she feared that it was impending over the boys. We had always considered it a good sign when he stood still to listen to her. Nesta thought so well of his attention now,

that she ventured to insinuate two little hands into one of his, and whisper, "You are not angry with Charlie, papa?"

"Angry!" There was a pause, and my father's voice, which had sounded harshly, took a deeper tone. "I don't know yet, Nesta, how much of what I am feeling now is anger for the disappointment to my own pride; how much just displeasure at my poor boy's folly. Let me go, Nesta. Let me go, dear love; before evening I shall have found out. It is well that the post comes in early, and that he will arrive late; you will have time for your preparations to receive him rightly, and I for mine."

He left us and retired to the den; and my mother, after giving Nesta permission to open and read Lady Helen Carr's letter, went up to her own room. I had then leisure to open Hilary's letter to me. It was a pleasant letter for a sister to receive from a brother on her birthday; it showed so plainly that he had been thinking of me; it was full of allusions to past birthdays of mine and his—childish pleasures, childish jokes, which even I had forgotten, and which could only have lingered in a heart as faithful and true to home memories as Hilary's. Ernestine had finished reading her two letters, when I looked up from mine. With a mischievous smile on her face, she handed me Hilary's note first. The paper contained only a few lines:—

"DEAR NESTA,—If you have not procured the waistbands for which I gave you a commission, don't get them. Miss Lester has changed her mind; she says she can buy what she wants at Bangor, and prefers not to trouble either you or me. In haste—the letters are gone, I shall have to send an express with this. I would not have the belts sent to Miss Lester now on *any* account. Keep them for yourself if they are bought—I will pay for them.

"Yours,
"HILARY."

"Much ado about nothing," was my comment on the epistle.

"More ado about nothing," Nesta laughed, handing me Lady Helen's.

I retired with it to the window, and knit my brows. Lady Helen's letters were always a puzzle to me—it was a puzzle why she kept up a correspondence with us at all. Her

letter of that morning began with an account of her reception at Morfa, where she had been staying a fortnight, when she began to write. A few of her words called up a picture such as all Hilary's carefully exact descriptions of the same scenes had failed to give. As I read, I approached with her to the new great house of Morfa Mawr. I saw the broad road cut in the side of a thickly-wooded hill, the rapid descent into the valley, the down-sloping avenue, and then the gleaming white mansion whose stately terraced pleasure grounds and "ordered gardens great," turned the once sterile valley among the hills into a wonder of cultivation. Best of all, however, I saw the figures that gave life to Lady Helen's picture—Mr. Lester standing midway on the lofty flight of marble steps that led to the door, his white head bare, his cheeks flushed with excitement, both hands held out eagerly to welcome his guest; and at the top, withdrawn into the shade of the doorway, Rosamond Lester, a tall lithe figure, a riding-cap shading her black brows and almost fierce-looking eyes (my fancy said fierce, Lady Helen's letter said strangely bright)—one hand gathered together the folds of her riding-habit, the other played with her whip; there was no hand ready for Lady Helen, but a cold smooth cheek, exquisitely coloured, was negligently turned to receive her kiss. A long interval appeared to have passed between the writing of the commencement and the conclusion of the letter. I remember the exact words of the latter part, for they referred to Hilary.

"During these weeks I have seen much of your son Hilary," Lady Helen wrote. "Ah! my dear Mrs. Scott, now you are interested, now you hold my paper firmly, you have found what you have waded through all this preamble to seek. Well, you are right to prize this son of yours; even I can acknowledge that he is a son for a mother to rest on, and be proud of. He has great influence with every one here. I fancy he owes it to a certain singleness of character which favourably affects people like Mr. Lester and Rosamond, who are always quarrelling with each other and with themselves. It is a dangerous gift, this power of gaining influence; I don't say your son will find it so, but I drop a word as a warning. Young people are fond of power, and elderly people, even when they have wills as strong as Mr.

Lester's, submit sometimes to self-imposed authority, till some unexpected disagreement causes them to feel its restraint. I don't know a position which calls for the exercise of greater tact and good sense, than that in which your son stands towards his relatives at Morfa Mawr. Don't be alarmed, however; he has so very much good sense, that the tact he has not may in his case perhaps be dispensed with. Having spoken so long of *your* son, I may now say a word about *mine*. I have heard from him this morning. He returns to England from his long sojourn in the East next Thursday, and purposes to join me here. I have written to urge his doing so, and yet I mean to leave Morfa on the morning of the day on which he will reach it. You don't believe me; the very idea of such an unnatural proceeding makes your maternal hair stand on end; but such is my intention, and I mean to keep it. That you may not think me quite a monster, I will explain my reason for acting in this way. I wish Mr. Lester to know and like my son, now that he is a grown-up man and worth knowing, and I think this end will be best attained by my keeping out of the way during their first interview. Both are so reserved, that they will never really find each other out, if I am there to interpret between them. I shall go to London for a few months, and look up my old friends. Your house will be one of the first at which I shall call.

"Yours faithfully,

"HELEN CARR."

"What a strange reason Lady Helen gives for leaving Morfa," I observed, as I returned the letter to Nesta. "Why should she care so very much what opinion Mr. Lester forms of her son?"

"There are other people at Morfa besides Mr. Lester," said Ernestine, demurely.

"Rosamond!" I exclaimed. "Nesta, how clever you are. Yes, I see. I *can* understand why Lady Helen should covet *her* good opinion for her son, and why she should feel that he is more likely to gain it if she keeps out of the way. Rosamond has always disliked Lady Helen, but she may get to like Mr. Carr. If she did—if they became attached to each other—how happy Lady Helen and Mr. Lester would be. It would make up for the old disappointment, and really be a beautiful end to the history."

"Only it has not begun yet," said Nesta. "And it is after all only a guess of mine, that Lady Helen has such a thought in her head. So don't let's say any more about it."

CHAPTER IX.

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

It had become such a settled custom that Nesta was to be my mother's helper in all domestic affairs, that I had no opportunity of judging how her preparations for receiving Charlie went on during the day. But when my father came to me in the evening to receive the notes for his lecture, which it was my business to write out legibly for him in large text-hand, I gathered from my first glance at his face that his preparations, of whatever nature they had been, had brought back tranquillity and gentle feeling.

"So, Janet," he said, while I was busy arranging his notes and books of reference in his coat-pockets, "your birthday will be kept; you will have a guest after all."

There had been some talk between Nesta, my mother, and Mr. Armstrong, of giving a party to celebrate my eighteenth birthday, but I had stoutly resisted the notion.

"Oh, papa," I said—"I might be glad. If it were a happy home-coming I should wish for nothing better to celebrate my birthday."

"Let it be happy," my father said, gently; "only something very bad indeed should cloud a home-coming. I remember I could never enjoy a welcome I had not earned: but perhaps it is well sometimes to give what is not earned."

"I wonder how Charlie can bear to disappoint you," I exclaimed. "Oh, papa, shall you mind very much the sort of fuss there will be among our friends—the questions they will ask about Charlie's success in the examination, and the surprise they will put on?"

"No, not *very* much, not as much as you will. If it were only that our family vanity had to suffer, it would signify little. I must be tolerant, Janet, for fear of being too hard. I find I have been transferring my own starved-out ambition

to him. How deceitful our hearts are! I thought my longing for worldly success had been killed long since. I am afraid it has still another death to die."

A quick knock at the door here interrupted our conversation, and put an end to the happiest part of my day, when I had my father all to myself. Mr. Armstrong had called to walk with him to the lecture-room. His careful guidance was a comfort to my father, for which I was daily growing more thankful. The least I could do was to take care that my father should never keep him waiting a moment through any fault of mine.

That evening I half expected a quick step on the stairs to follow the knock at the door. A year ago, on the same day, Mr. Armstrong had remembered my birthday, and found something to say to me about it. I had quarrelled with his congratulations at the time; I should probably have done so again if they had been repeated, and yet I felt a little blank when no one appeared, and I had to go to the head of the stairs to light my father down. It is, after all, pleasant to have *any* one remember one's birthday.

The feeling of disappointment did not last long. My thoughts soon reverted to what my father had said to me; and I began to walk up and down the dining-room, building (I am sorry to say) an idle castle in the air, in which I fancied myself in Charlie's place, winning honours and distinctions, and prizing them only for the pleasure they were to give my father. I was roused from my amusement at last by feeling a very cold hand on my shoulder, and a voice, half playful, half cross, exclaimed in my ear, "You wretched child, you have let the fire go out!"

A tall figure stood behind me. The handsome head, with its dark rich waves of brown hair, the straight features, the changeful eyes, the beautiful mouth, now shaded by a brown moustache, were all so familiar, that a certain strangeness in all made me feel for an instant more abashed than if I had been in the presence of a stranger. "Charlie!"—I hesitated. Yes, to be sure! "No need for me to say 'Janet!'" If I had not seen you for a hundred years I should know that no other mortal but yourself would sit in a draughty room on an east-windy day like this, and let the fire go out. No, don't touch it; I am the only fire-doctor in the family."

He walked to the fire, and began violently raking out the

half-extinguished cinders. "Where are my mother and Nesta?" he asked.

"Upstairs in your room, making ready for you," I answered.

"What, at it still?" I thought I should have escaped all the fuss. I wish I had not missed that early train."

"You would have been here the sooner," I said.

"Not I. I should have been spending the day with some other men at Ely, but I missed them, so I came on home."

"For want of something better to do? Oh Charlie!"

"Well, you don't seem so especially glad to see me that I need make great haste to come to you."

Before I had time to answer, my mother and Nesta, having heard the news of his arrival, came running into the room together. There was no want of warmth in their welcome, and Charlie, having perhaps expended his uncomfortable feeling on me, responded to it graciously.

The air of grown-up mannishness and dash that had overawed me did not prevent Nesta from recognising the real Charlie. She fell at once into her old position towards him, which was that of a domineering slave.

She waited on him as never sultan was waited on, running away with his heavy coat, and bringing him slippers that had been warmed all day, and spoiling him to his heart's content; yet, all through the talk that followed, the asking after old friends, the recurrence to old jokes and family mysteries, she did not let him escape a pretty sharp fire of banter upon certain little alterations in his dress, speech, and manner, including an incipient beard and moustache, which I should never have noticed separately, but which, combined, had given me the feeling of strangeness I had received when Charlie first entered. Many sisters experience this feeling in welcoming to a very quiet home a brother who has been long absent from them in the world.

For a time Charlie defended himself stoutly, finding wonderfully philosophical reasons to give for his way of parting his hair, for the style of his dress, and for his constant use of certain words and phrases, to which Nesta objected on the ground of our father's well-known hatred to every kind of siang. As the evening passed on, however, I observed that he looked at the little clock on the chimney-piece oftener than I did, and when the half-hour after nine struck, he disappeared from the room.

At ten, when, punctual as clock-work, my father's knock came, we heard him rush downstairs to open the door. Five minutes afterwards my father entered the drawing-room, and Charlie, following a little behind, stood still in the doorway, and made a grimace of disgust towards Nesta, as calling upon her to look and mourn over her doings. The moustache had disappeared, and every other novel item in the costume: it was altogether our own Charlie again, with an expression on his face that we had often seen there in old times, when, after a school-boy scrape, he had been making peace—a little serious, a little shame-faced, but with a spark of comicality twinkling in his eyes, which seemed to warn us, "Don't make too much of this fit of submission, I don't at all intend it to have more than its turn." We were all too well trained to utter an exclamation; but when my father, turning round, drew Charlie gently forward under the lamp, and took a long straining look into his face, Nesta and I exchanged glances of congratulation. A low sigh, which sounded to me like a sigh of relief, caught my quick ears, as my father withdrew his hand from Charlie's shoulder and raised it to shade his eyes—his old gesture, only used now when an unusual effort to see clearly had brought back the almost forgotten pain. It was not my father's fault that Charlie remained grave and silent for the rest of the evening; he gave him encouragement enough to talk, and seemed anxious to hear every particular of the day's journey. His kindness was not quite thrown away however. I was pleased to see that Charlie did not hurry off to bed when my mother, Nesta, and I left the room, as he was wont to do when he dreaded a lecture; and when I returned to the drawing-room five minutes afterwards to look for a book, I found that he had betaken himself to his old favourite seat, on the arm of my father's chair; while my father, turning his face towards him, was saying, in that peculiarly gentle tone of his, which I used to think belonged to Charlie and my mother alone:

"Come, now, my boy, let us talk this business of the scholarship over, together; I want to understand it."

I slipped noiselessly away; leaving them to have their talk out undisturbed. It had at least two good results—one was, that Charlie having been brought to confess his past idleness, was obliged to shut himself up every day in the den for an hour or two's reading; the second, that he reserved all expres-

sion of his disgust at what he called the confined nature of college studies for Nesta's and my benefit, instead of inflating them also on my father and mother. Nesta and I were by this time pretty well used to Charlie's habit of always thinking himself cleverer than his teachers, but we were somewhat astonished to hear the tone of contemptuous pity in which he now spoke of dignitaries of whom my father stood in awe. Nesta laughed at him, but I used to grow angry. It was hardly probable, I argued, that among so many learned and experienced men, there should not be one capable of understanding the requirements of Charlie's genius. I would not be persuaded by all his eloquence and ridicule that he could not, if he chose, learn something worth knowing from some of them. I don't think, however, that I did much good by arguing with him, and it certainly promoted the family peace when a new subject of interest came up and diverted my thoughts and Nesta's into a fresh channel. We heard from Hilary that Lady Helen Carr had actually come to London, and that she might be expected soon to call on us, having promised Mr. Lester to lose no time in doing so. Rosamond, who was to be presented this spring, was to join Lady Helen in London shortly. She was very anxious to know us, Hilary said, and looked forward to spending many days in Nesta's and my company, and to having us frequently with her.

It cannot be denied that this news opened a somewhat dazzling prospect before Nesta and me. Perhaps we talked too much about it; too much, certainly, for our father's and Mr. Armstrong's patience. They began to declare that they hated the sound of Lady Helen's name; and even Charlie rebelled when he found that Nesta persisted in spoiling the comfort of the drawing-room by banishing all untidy-looking books and work-baskets from it; and that she and my mother considered it necessary to establish themselves in state and idleness there every afternoon, instead of being ready to go out or sit with him in the den. We were all relieved when, at the end of three weeks' waiting, a thoroughly wet day gave us one afternoon when we thought we might feel secure from callers. My mother especially hailed it joyfully, as a respite from enforced idleness, for it was the last day but one before Charlie was to leave us, and she was anxious to secure Nesta's undivided attention for a final inspection of his ward-

robe. My mother was fond of gathering all her work about her at once, and every one knows into what a state a tidy drawing-room may be brought by needlewomen who, on a rainy afternoon, have settled themselves to put a stitch in time into all the garments in their possession that require it. When the evening began to close in we had all earned the comfortable feeling of having got through a great deal of business. Piles of neatly folded work occupied most of the chairs; the table was strewn with shreds of calico and thread-papers; and a row of newly-marked collars hung round the fire to dry.

Charlie, who had chosen to stay out all the afternoon in the pouring rain, returned at six, very wet and shivering, and vehemently seconded a proposal of Nesta's that we should reward ourselves for our industry, by indulging in what we called a *nursery tea*. My mother was always glad of anything that put her in mind of nursery days, and the spirit with which Charlie entered into Nesta's plan gratified her. He insisted on having the old large nursery tea-kettle brought down to the drawing-room fire, and the old cups and plates, no two of which matched; and he claimed, with the vehemence of old times, the privilege of sitting on the hearthrug to make my mother's toast. The old objects brought old associations with them—old stories, old jokes, not worth laughing at, but charming to us, who from the advanced standing-ground we had gained, were beginning to look back with good-natured contempt on our childish selves—dearest of all, perhaps, to our mother, who, feeling rather faint-hearted as she looked forward, was disposed to fancy those childish days of ours freer from care than she had found them while they were passing.

We were all very merry and somewhat noisy, or we could not have failed to hear a knock at our front door. Charlie and Nesta said afterwards they had heard it, but that it was such a consequential sound, they could not believe it came from our sober-minded knocker. However that may be, we were none of us prepared for the interruption when our little waiting-maid, half-hesitatingly, opened the drawing-room door, and announced, "Please, marm, Lady Helleng Cart's called. She would come in. Where am I to take her to? The fire in the drawing-room's gone out, and she is in the hall now."

"No, not in the hall, dear Mrs. Scott ; here," a clear shrill voice said, and gliding in some mysterious manner before the stolid figure of the servant who resolutely stood her ground, a graceful figure came forward into the fitful fire-light. "It was very presumptuous of me, but I *could* not wait to know if I were welcome ; the sound of your voices and laughter drew me up the stairs—I could not resist it. No, do not any of you move, please ; ask me to sit down among you. Think what a pleasure such a tea-drinking as this will give a poor solitary like me, who eats and drinks alone, or starves in company."

We did not all sit still, we had risen in some confusion before this long address came to an end ; but I felt the charm of my mother's innate good manners, when I saw how easily she fell in to her visitor's wish, putting aside the housewifely vexation I knew she must be feeling. There was a little trembling in her voice when she directed Charlie to remove a work-basket from a cushioned chair, and wheel it to the fire for Lady Helen ; but she did not attempt any explanation of the irregularities of our nursery tea, or stop Nesta with a frown when she offered tea in a pink cup with a brown saucer. I really don't think, either, that Lady Helen saw anything amiss in the arrangements of the room. When she was seated—by which time Charlie, with a gentleman's injudiciousness, had turned on the gaslight—I noticed that she looked quickly from one to another, but it was at *us* she looked ; at my mother's gentle fair face ; at Charlie as he stood under the lamp ; at Nesta, who, after having presented the tea, took the low seat Charlie had left on the hearthrug, almost at her feet ; even I sustained a quick penetrating look which I felt was not altogether disapproving. A shade came over our visitor's face when she had thus surveyed us all : her flow of talk ceased, and for an instant or two she sat silent, slowly stirring her tea ; not with any air of embarrassment, but as if she had suddenly fallen into a reverie. She had come to us on her way to an evening party, and was dressed in a velvet dress of very dark blue, the darkness of which one or two diamond ornaments relieved. I thought the richness of her dress made her sallow face and thin figure look quaintly withered and insignificant, and that she might have sat for the likeness of a capricious fairy godmother in a German tale. The silence

lasted some minutes, for we were none of us sufficiently composed to begin a conversation. Lady Helen broke it first.

"You could not forget that I am here, could you," she said; "and go on talking and laughing as you were doing before I came in? I should so like to hear it for once; I don't want to spoil the enjoyment of your evening."

Her tone of voice was almost supplicating, and went to Nesta's heart. In the quick impulsive way which, with all her reserve, she had sometimes, she took one of Lady Helen's hands.

"It would not help us to enjoy ourselves to forget that you are here," she said; "and it would be impossible."

Lady Helen, without disengaging her hand from Nesta's clasp, used it to raise her drooping face towards the light. "You pretty child!" then turning to my mother, "Oh, Mrs. Scott, how I do envy you! I used to despise daughters, and feel thankful not to have had one; the sight of this one of yours tempts me to change my mind. But no, my daughter would not have been like this, she might have been like myself, and then we should have quarrelled terribly. I should not have liked to see a repetition of my own faults and oddities. I am better alone, don't you think so?"

My mother answered, that she did not know; "It was difficult to say whether people were better off with few or many children—that was all ordered; but she agreed with Lady Helen; it *was* a trial to see one's faults re-appear in one's children, perhaps however it was only in seeing them there, that one could be quite sorry enough for them."

Lady Helen's face showed a slight surprise at hearing her random speech answered so seriously. "My dear, you know nothing at all about it," she said. "You never had a fault in your life, and as for deficiencies," she paused and looked keenly down into Nesta's face, as if she were looking for something there. My mother took advantage of the silence to ask a question which all this time had been trembling on her tongue. How long was it since Lady Helen had seen Hilary, and how had he looked when she last saw him?—she, his mother, had not seen him for two whole years. One eager question followed another, for Lady Helen answered fully and readily. If there was, as I suspected, sometimes a little sarcasm in the tone in which she dwelt on very small

details, my mother was not likely to find it out. It seemed quite natural to her that Lady Helen should have noticed how quickly Hilary had ridden to Tann y Bryn and back, to summon a doctor when Mr. Lester had been taken suddenly ill; how cleverly he had recovered Rosamond's pet dog when it had been stolen by gipsies; and how patiently he held tangled skeins of silk for Rosamond's companion, old Mrs. Western. She did not perceive, as I did, that all Lady Helen's anecdotes tended to show Hilary in the light of a mere hanger-on at Morfa Mawr. I grew so impatient of hearing him pictured in this character, that I interrupted Lady Helen's last story with an abrupt question about our cousin Rosamond.

"We are all so curious about her," I said. "Do describe her to us, and tell us what you think of her."

Lady Helen turned towards me; "I am so glad you, and not any one else, asked me that question," she said "for I am quite sure you will understand my answer, though it will be another question. Is it fair to ask me to describe a person I don't know?"

"But you do know Rosamond Lester; you have known her since she was a child," my mother exclaimed.

"Your daughter shall judge whether I know her or not. Has not some wise man (Carlyle, I think) said, or written, that we can only *know* what we *love*? Now Rosamond and I hate each other, consequently we are perfect strangers. Is that well-reasoned, Miss Janet?"

"But not true," my mother gently interposed. "You know, Lady Helen, you always were fond of saying things about yourself you did not mean. Middle-aged women like you and me cannot hate a young girl."

"Can they not? Well, perhaps you are right; hate is too strong a word—dislike will do. Middle-aged women, as you call us—and how dreadful it sounds!—have seldom motive enough for such an active feeling as hatred, unless perhaps the young girls happen to be their daughters-in-law; in that case I hope you will allow that no expression can be too strong for the feeling."

"Oh!" I could not help exclaiming hastily; "then *that* is why you hate Rosamond Lester?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Janet, but *what* is why? It is stupid of me not to understand you, but I do not."

With those politely questioning eyes fixed on me, I felt how incautiously I had spoken. "I meant—I thought," I stammered in some confusion, "that perhaps you dislike Miss Lester because she is likely one day to be—what you said."

"My daughter-in-law! My dear Miss Janet, you are really very ingenious; and considering that you know nothing of the circumstances, your guess is not a very improbable one. Your brother would have enlightened you if you had imparted your idea to him; he would have told you, to how many thousands a year Miss Lester is heiress; and with your good sense you would have seen at once that such a person is not to be lightly disposed of. She will no doubt 'break some country hearts for pastime ere she comes to town;' but happily my son's is not a *country* heart."

"But, Lady Helen," my mother said, anxiously, "I hope Mr. Lester won't set his heart on any one person, or try unduly to influence his granddaughter's choice; I hope he will remember—" My mother here suddenly recollected to whom she was speaking, and stopped in dire confusion.

Lady Helen waited in an attitude of quiet attention, and then said, "I think you have not quite finished your sentence, dear Mrs. Scott."

"Well, remember how different old people's and young people's tastes in such matters always are," my mother bravely concluded.

"Used to be, you mean," Lady Helen answered. "Yes, you and I can remember a time when girls of eighteen and men of two-and-twenty, or even older, thought themselves young enough to fall in love, and upset their friends' plans, with all sorts of vagaries; but such things are traditions now. Now the young people make worldly-wise schemes for themselves, and the elders are reduced to the tame amusement of watching how cleverly they carry them out. You know how indolent I am; well, I have promised Mr. Lester to act as Rosamond's *chaperon* during her first season in London. You may judge how confident I am in her wisdom, and how little trouble I expect to have on her account."

"She used to be so self-willed," I remarked.

"So she still is; but since her will is a prudent one, we elders have nothing to do but let her have it. She is proud enough to know her own value, and quite fond enough of

distinction and homage to aim at making a great marriage without our suggesting the wish."

"But can Rosamond really be so proud and worldly-minded?" said my mother, wonderingly, "Hilary has given us quite a different character of her. He describes her as being quite simple-hearted and kind, and so useful, taking an interest in the farm business, and in the poor, and riding about to all the outlying cottages."

"Simple-hearted, useful, and kind; that is your son's view of her character, then?" Lady Helen said, reflectively. "Well, I do not dispute his judgment; we have all more than one character; and it is generally quite impossible to say which is the true one. I should be sorry to restrict Rosamond to the one she shows to me. Your son, from the position he holds at Morfa, has opportunities of judging which I have not."

I was provoked by the emphasis Lady Helen laid on the word "position," to express a thought I might otherwise have kept to myself. "Lady Helen," I said, "you were quoting Carlyle just now; do you remember what he says about people being able to see in others *only* the evil or the good they have in themselves?"

Lady Helen turned slightly, so as to look me full in the face. "My dear girl, that is rather a clever remark, but, pardon me, it ought to have been made behind my back, not to my face; it is never worth while, even for the sake of saying a clever thing, to be rude to any one."

I was silenced for the evening; but happily my mother was able, with a clear conscience, to assure Lady Helen that I had not meant to say anything rude, I was too fond of talking, and often made foolish remarks, but she trusted that I was never intentionally rude to any one.

Lady Helen listened to my mother's explanation graciously, though not without directing an incredulous, amused smile towards me, which I felt was more friendly than I deserved.

Soon afterwards she rose to go, and, in taking leave, expressed a hope that she should, for the future, see much of us. Rosamond was hoping to have the pleasure of her cousins' company constantly, and had made many plans for inducing us to share in the pleasures and amusements her London season was to introduce her to.

My mother shook her head doubtfully, and began a sen-

tence about Mr. Scott's unfortunate dislike to society ; but Lady Helen did not wait for her to finish it. "Eight o'clock!" she exclaimed ; "is it possible? I ought now to be at the other end of London. Well, good-bye ; I see I have gained the young people, and I leave the matter in their hands. However strict Mr. Scott's views about society may be, I am sure they will be modified by the pleading of such sweet brown eyes as these down here." She stroked Nesta's cheek as she said this, shook hands hurriedly with my mother and me, and left us.

It was not till Charlie had returned from handing her to her carriage that we were sufficiently at our ease to begin making remarks upon our visitor. My mother spoke first.

"Well, I certainly never was more surprised in my life," she said. "It was very inconsiderate of Lady Helen to call on such a rainy day ; and yet I cannot be sorry that she came. It is pleasant to know that it is only a fortnight to-day since she saw Hilary, and she has told me many things about him that I am very glad to know. I shall always think the better of her for knowing so much about Hilary."

"I like her, Janet," whispered Nesta. "I cannot help liking her. I hope you won't mind it. Did you notice how sad she looked when she was not speaking?"

Charlie pronounced that she had *character*, a dictum which at that period was the single meed of praise he ever awarded to any one, for he professed to think it a matter of indifference whether the character were good or bad, so long as it was (what he called) individual.

Our father, who had been detained by a meeting of school trustees (a quarterly infliction especially hateful to him), came home very late and much tired—too tired to show any interest in our account of Lady Helen's visit, or to take other notice of her invitation to us than by pronouncing an indifferent "Indeed!" when my mother repeated it verbally.

CHAPTER X.

"Du, die du alle Wunden heilest,
 Der Freundschaft zarte leise Hand,
 Des Lebens Bürden liebend theilest—
 Du, die ich früher suchst und fand."

SCHILLER.

CHARLIE left us the next morning, and our days fell into the routine which his coming had disturbed. We had no second visit from Lady Helen, neither did we hear any news of Rosamond Lester, though we knew from Hilary's letters that she must now be in London. Seeing that our father disliked the subject, we left off talking about her coming; but Nesta and I wasted many half-hours privately in wondering when we should first see her; whether she really wished to make us her constant companions; and if she did, whether we should be allowed to be much with her. When we were alone, we laid elaborate plots for learning our father's decision on this matter; but when we saw his worn anxious face at night, we had not the heart to ask him any questions. An accident at last led to the desired talk. One evening, about a fortnight after Charlie had left us, Mr. Armstrong called earlier than usual to walk with my father to the lecture; and while I was still occupied in arranging my father's notes and books, he sauntered to my writing-table, and amused himself by turning over the scraps of paper with which it was littered. He was welcome to turn them over, for, with the exception of some little pictures with which in idle moments I had adorned the edges of sheets, they contained only half-worked sums and problems in algebra. It was one of the duties bequeathed to me by Hilary to work out in full, and write legibly, all the sums and problems on which the boys in my father's class were likely to be engaged during the week; that my father might spare his eyes by making the monitor of the class correct their papers by mine, instead of looking them over himself. I had no great aptitude for figures, and must have resigned my task long ago, if Mr. Armstrong had not, since Hilary's departure, made a practice of dropping in before the lecture-hour, on one evening of every week, and carrying off from my table all the half-done and wrongly-done sums he could lay his hands upon. These

usually came back to me in one of my father's coat-pockets when he returned from the lecture, not only correctly worked, but with explanatory notes appended, which made all my puzzles clear to me.

On the Friday week after Charlie left us, I was conscious that I was very much behind-hand with my work. I had devoted a long afternoon to it in the hope of making up for past dreamy hours ; but I had not been in the right mood ; the figures would not add up, and I had impatiently thrown aside one problem after another in despair. When I saw how many papers Mr. Armstrong was preparing to carry away, I was so much ashamed of myself, that I could not help speaking crossly.

"Papa is ready, Mr. Armstrong," I said ; "and I do wish that you would leave all those papers alone. I know some of them are wrong, but I can put them right. It is very disagreeable to have one's work taken away just as one is beginning to understand it."

"I know it is disagreeable," he answered, "and therefore I will not have my work taken away from me. I have lit upon a puzzle which I must solve. I do not understand the meaning of this week's illustrations. Hitherto I have followed you with great success, and known, by the pictures on the margin of your sums, what books you have been reading. I have made out the end of several novels of which I have only had patience to read the beginning ; but I cannot discover in what company you have spent this last week. I ought surely to know this satirical old lady and her haughty daughter down here in this corner. Ah ! and here are your sister and yourself in the background. Surely this must be an incipient novel of your own ?"

"It is no such thing," I said hastily ; "I suppose there is nothing ridiculous in sketching people that one has really seen. The elder lady is a likeness of Lady Helen Carr, and the younger is meant for Rosamond Lester—that is all."

"So much the more I shall enjoy looking at them ; I know we are going to have a dull lecture to-night, and as I dare not set the example of going to sleep, I must have something to amuse me."

I allowed Mr. Armstrong to put the papers in his pocket as he finished speaking, for I perceived that my father, who seldom paid much attention to our little quarrels, had heard

and been struck by what we were saying. He turned back, and put his hand on my head.

"What, you too, Janet?" he said, "are *your* thoughts running on Lady Helen and her promised gaieties? I did not think you had been so foolish, child."

I was seldom annoyed by anything my father said, but somehow it vexed me to be called a foolish child, and accused before Mr. Armstrong of letting my thoughts run on gaieties. I am afraid I drew my head away very ill-humouredly from under my father's hand, and that my face expressed considerable vexation; but before I had time to say anything, he had left the room. I knew that he would not forget my look and gesture, and that we should neither of us be happy till we had talked the matter out, so I lingered in the dining-room at night, after my mother and Nesta had gone up to bed. My father was sitting in a rather dejected attitude, with his elbows on his knees, and his head bowed between his hands. When I ventured to take Charlie's place on the arm of his chair, he did not speak for some time; then lifting up his head, he said aloud, but not to me:—

"'Who maketh men to be of one mind in a house;'—Yes, only He can do it;—He, the Father of spirits. Earthly fathers acknowledge His power when they try to obtain that great blessing, 'one mind in a house,' and fail."

"Oh papa!" I began, "I am very sorry—if we had known that you disliked the thought of our visiting our cousin Rosamond so very much, we would have given up the idea at once."

"You are a good child, Janet; but I was not thinking only of Rosamond Lester, or of that one point, on which I see that there are two minds among us. I was looking backwards and forwards. Janet, I do believe that it is a great misfortune to a family for one member of it to have belonged once to a higher rank than the rest. The distinction is never forgotten; it comes up again and again. The old associations, the old prejudices, are renewed at the most unexpected times, on the most opposite subjects; and when friends from the old circle interfere with foolish patronage, there is no saying where the mischief will end."

"Papa," I said, "if you really think that it is mischief, we will give up seeing Rosamond Lester."

"I am sure that it is mischief, but I am not sure that I

can or ought to prevent your knowing her. I cannot forbid your cousin coming here to chatter about her gaities, and fill your head and Nesta's with vain longing after pleasures unsuited to your station; and if I refuse to let you have them, I cannot prevent your poor mother from thinking secretly that I have injured you, by keeping you out of the society to which she thinks you properly belong. And then, Janet, I am not clear that I should do right in putting that mortification on her who has already borne so many."

My father's voice dropped; he was falling into a reverie again. I roused him by putting down my hand, and smoothing out the deep furrows into which he had knit his brows.

"But, papa," I said, "why should you fear that our knowing Rosamond, and spending a few evenings at Lady Helen's house, should do us so much harm? You must not think so badly of Nesta and me, as to suppose that we shall be easily made discontented with our own home."

"Ah, Janet! I thought you were above coaxing. Well, I must make the best of it. I comfort myself by believing that you will see less of these people than you imagine. When your cousin is once engaged in the round of dissipation to which Lady Helen will introduce her, she will have no time for seeking you out, in our remote part of the world."

"But Lady Helen said we were to go to her."

"Well, we shall see."

"We *may* go then if we are asked, and you will not dislike our going?"

"You may go, and I will trust you. There is one point I must mention, Janet, and that is, you must be careful not to be led into unnecessary expense. Charlie seems a little bewildered as to the capacities of my purse, and as to what are his reasonable claims on it."

"But indeed, papa," I cried, "Nesta and I never thought of incurring expense."

"You will have to think of it, if you begin to associate with such people as Rosamond Lester; but never mind; I trust you, Janet; you will never misunderstand me, or think I grudge you anything. Perhaps I am growing fanciful, but there was a tone in Charlie's voice, when he and I talked over his college expenses that last evening, which lingers in my ear, and *will* go on grieving me; the ear grows sensitive, *over* sensitive, when one has to depend on it for

almost all the impressions one receives. If I could have seen my boy's face as distinctly as I used to see it, I should not have fancied that he was dissatisfied with what I was doing for him; he must have known it was all I could do."

"Yes, indeed," I said, and I tried by the heartiness of my assurance, to make up for certain misgivings in my heart. I had seen Charlie's face, and I had not liked the expression on it any better than the tone of his voice.

When I had wished my father good-night, I saw him go to his desk, open a long unused drawer in it, and take out a bundle of papers. I remembered how, some years ago, he used, late in the evening, to sit down before that desk, with his books and papers around him, and how my mother used to complain about his writing far into the night, and waking her in the early morning, by talking in his sleep, about battles and conspiracies, and "the deaths of kings." Now I saw him take up one closely-written sheet after another, hold it to the lamp, and then, with a melancholy shake of the head, return it to the drawer.

"If my eyes had served me a little longer," I heard him say, "I could have finished it, but it was *not* to be—it was *not* to be."

My father had a way of saying these words over and over to himself. To him, I am sure, they conveyed some sort of comfort; to me the mournfulness of his resignation was more oppressing than any complaining could have been.

After this conversation, Nesta and I considered it a settled point that we were to accept Lady Helen's invitations, and as time passed on, we began to be a little impatient for an opportunity to arrive for availing ourselves of the permission we had gained. That we might be ready for any emergency, my mother purchased a sufficient number of yards of white muslin to make us each a new evening dress, and Nesta and I spent our afternoons in hemming flounces for them. How strange it is to me now to recall the talk we had over that work!

"Do you think," Nesta said, one afternoon when we had been silent some little time, "that we shall see Charlie's friend some day when we are at Lady Helen's? I have such a great curiosity to see him; I always had."

"Charlie's friend—Mr. Carr, do you mean?" I asked. "I

dare say we shall see him. But what then? There are many other people I had much rather see."

"Yes, because you read so much more, and know more about authors and people than I do. Now, I have read Mr. Carr's book over and over again, and I certainly should like to see him. I don't wish to talk to him—I could not do that; but I should like to sit a little out of the way, and hear him talk to you. Oh, Janet, *do* you think such an evening as that will come?"

It was a prospect, on the whole, very agreeable to me, and Nesta and I often relieved the monotony of our hemming by recurring to it. We looked over the well-worn volume of poems which Mr. Carr had sent Charlie, and marked passages which Nesta thought I might ask to have explained. "You know," she pleaded, "even Mr. Armstrong does not understand these lines, but the person who wrote them must; and when he has made his meaning plain to us, how pleasant it will be! We shall care more for them than for all the rest of the book, which every one understands."

I was surprised to find how well Nesta knew the poems in this volume already, and how much more they meant to her than to me.

The flounces were all hemmed, and the dresses ready for use, some weeks before the least chance of their being wanted arose. It was not till the second week in May, that on returning from a walk, we heard that a young lady had been sitting for a long time with my mother. We concluded at once that it was Rosamond Lester, and hastened joyfully to the drawing-room. We found our visitor sitting on the sofa close to our mother, with both her hands affectionately clasped in hers. For a moment we feared we must have been mistaken in our guess, but when at the sound of our footsteps she turned her face towards us, we recognised her at once. She had grown much since we had last seen her, for she was now much above the common height, but her face had only changed in having developed into greater beauty. The large dark eyes, which I remembered so well, and had so often pictured to myself, met mine with the old startled look in them. She reminded me still of some shy, half-tamed creature, whose confidence might be won, but who was ready to start away, or turn restive at an unaccustomed look or word.

My mother had tamed her at once—that I learned by the attitude in which I had seen them together when I entered ; but she looked somewhat doubtfully at us, as if she were not quite sure how far we were to be trusted.

"Oh, Janet," my mother began, addressing me, when we had shaken hands with our cousin, and were seated, "you can't think what a happy morning I have had. Rosamond has been sitting with me ever since you went out, and we have been talking all the time about Hilary. She has told me so many pleasant things, which you shall hear by and by. I only regret that we did not see her sooner. She has been three weeks in London, and every day something has prevented her coming to us."

Miss Lester, who had been speaking aside to Nesta, broke off abruptly, and turned again to my mother.

"I did not say something had prevented me, but some person. I would not have allowed any *thing* to keep me from you, and for the future I mean to be independent in my coming and going. For a time London air made me feel too indolent to do battle for my rights, but last night Lady Helen Carr and I came to an understanding. I think I have made good use of my regained freedom, for in walking here this morning I have done what I should certainly never have obtained permission to do."

"Then I am sorry you came," my mother observed, gravely. "I am sorry that, even to please me, you should do anything for which Lady Helen might blame you."

"She will not blame me, not openly at least. She knows better than to do that. No one ever does blame me but my grandfather ; that is a privilege which he reserves exclusively to himself."

"But why does Lady Helen object to your coming to see us ?" I asked.

"She does not object to my coming to see you ; it was she herself who lured me up to London, by promising that I should see you often. She merely objects to my walking through the streets, or to my having the carriage in the morning till she is ready to attend me, or to my driving anywhere but in the parks in the afternoon, and generally to my spending an hour of my time in any way which she has not planned."

"How I pity you !" I exclaimed, heartily.

"Janet, for shame!" said my mother. "Lady Helen is quite right. Miss Lester has been entrusted to her charge, and it is her duty to take care of her. It is yours, my dear, to obey her. I am afraid you are not fond of doing as you are bid."

"I think I should be fond of doing as you bade me; I think I should be very tractable if I lived always with you. It will do me good to come here. I shall come to you for fresh air, just as at home I climb up the mountain, when Morfa Valley—the 'Happy Valley,' as people call it, to flatter my grandfather—feels too narrow to breathe in."

My mother looked puzzled. "My dear, I am afraid you will not get much fresh air here—nothing like mountain air. We consider our neighbourhood tolerably healthy for London. but I used to find the air very oppressive when I first lived here. However, if you do feel better here than in Lady Helen's house we shall be glad, for we cannot see you too often."

"Thank you. I hope you may be able to say so when you know me better. I warn you that I can be very disagreeable at times, disagreeable and discontented, as my cousin Hilary has no doubt told you. By the way, he is fond enough of scolding me."

"If you really are discontented, you deserve to be scolded. But, my dear, I don't understand how you can be. You seem to me to have everything that a young person can wish for; you ought to be grateful. I am sure you are."

"No, I am not. However, I will acknowledge that I have every *thing* a person can want. I often think I should like to have fewer things—I grow so tired of them all, and I don't feel that they are really mine. I am one of my grandfather's belongings, and like everything else that is his, I must be dressed out, and trained to look well in my place. I am never supposed to have a will of my own, and by and by, he means to make me and my possessions over to some one else."

"My dear Rosamond, I don't like to hear you speak so disrespectfully of your grandfather."

"We will not speak of him then. Let us talk of something else. I was trying to make you understand where the old hazel-fenced walk joins the new garden. May I take this pencil and sketch the new entrance for you?"

Admiring the sketch, and comparing it with stray sentences of description in Hilary's letters, brought us back to easy confidential chat about every-day doings at Morfa. If Miss Lester did not enjoy relating the details which our questions drew from her as much as we enjoyed hearing them, she at least put on the appearance of doing so; and our mother had such full confidence in her amiability that she sent me upstairs to bring down a fresh batch of Hilary's letters to be looked over when we had exhausted those she kept in her desk.

I was absent some minutes. When I re-entered I heard a fresh voice speaking rather loud, and saw to my secret dismay Lady Helen Carr seated on the sofa by my mother.

Lady Helen was addressing Rosamond, and did not immediately interrupt herself to speak to me. "My dear child," I heard her say, "if you had but taken the trouble to tell me that you were coming here, I would not have interrupted you. I would have sent the carriage for you later; as it is, I have wasted the morning in hunting you from place to place; and now I must drag you away against your will and my own, for if we are to go to Lady Melville's concert, we must hasten home. Ah, Miss Janet, you are come to make my task harder than ever. How shall I persuade Rosamond to come away, now you have brought some more letters to read? You have hunted out all these; how kind!"

"We were not going to read them *all*," I said, blushing and feeling under Lady Helen's satirical eye as if we had been caught doing something of which we ought to be ashamed.

"And why not? I have no doubt they are worth reading. Letters written in full family confidence are always interesting, especially when they come from one's own neighbourhood, and one has a chance of finding some mention of one's self in them. I am sure Rosamond misses a great deal by not hearing these."

Lady Helen's tone was quite polite, but I felt there was some sarcasm hidden in her words, for Rosamond's cheek flushed on hearing them, and her dark brows lowered over her eyes. Yes, they might almost be called fierce eyes now, as she stood confronting Lady Helen.

Without noticing her angry look, Lady Helen turned to the table on which several closely-written sheets lay open.

"What a pleasure it must be to you," she said to my mother, "to receive such letters, and how remarkable it is that such a busy person as your son should find time to write them. I think I could match them for length with some which I received a week or two ago from Shafto; but then his merit would not be the same, for he has nothing to do but write one thing or another, whenever the fancy takes him. A fancy for letter-writing took him when he was staying at Morfa, and I profited by it; but I shall not read *his* letters to you, my dear Rosamond; *my* conscience would not permit me to administer such a potion to your vanity."

"Lady Helen," interrupted Rosamond, "you said you were in a hurry to go; I am ready."

"But stay, am I? not quite—I have something to say to Mrs. Scott. We were talking of engagements just now, and it puts me in mind that you have not said when your daughters are to come to me. It must be some evening when I am at home, and that, I am sorry to say, is very seldom."

My mother murmured something about hoping Lady Helen would not inconvenience herself on our account; in answer to which Lady Helen smiled, and "*only wished* her time was her own, and that she *could* spend it with the people she really preferred." Then she proceeded to turn over the leaves of her memorandum book, reading aloud to us, and commenting as she went on. "Tuesday, that is to-morrow; you will not accept so short an invitation. Wednesday, the opera. Thursday, Lady Linton's ball; a great bore, and terrible fatigue to me. I tried to get off, but Rosamond could not be excused. Friday and Saturday, and the early days of the following week, are all occupied, I find, with engagements very little to my taste or yours; but the week after I will be 'at home' myself. Tuesday is to be my night; to-morrow fortnight then, my dear Mrs. Scott, you shall trust Janet and Ernestine to me. Thank you. I am glad we have settled it, for I may not be able to come so far northwards again; and now, Rosamond, we positively must say good-bye."

"I shall see you often again, I hope," Rosamond said in a low voice, as she shook hands with my mother.

Meanwhile, Lady Helen stroked Nesta's cheek, and com-

plimented her on her pretty morning looks, and then, with more smiling good-byes, she sailed out of the room.

When the door had closed behind them, my mother looked up at Nesta and me, with some bewilderment in her eyes. "To-morrow fortnight," she said, "Dear me! how very busy fashionable people appear to be. Not one disengaged evening for a fortnight! We need not have been in such a hurry about the muslin dresses, and your father need not have been so disturbed by the thought of your visiting your cousin. Her coming to London will not make any great difference to you after all, I begin to think."

"We do not know yet; we shall see," I answered, shortly, being unwilling to confess even to myself how very blank I felt, and how much ashamed I was beginning to be of the foolish castles in the air we had been building. Before evening, however, Nesta and I had talked ourselves into good spirits again, and were so much the less prepared for a more complete disappointment which was in store for us. Four days before the much talked-of Tuesday the late post brought my mother a hasty note from Lady Helen, in which she informed us that Rosamond Lester had been unwell for some days, and that, though sorry to give up many pleasant engagements, and especially the prospect of seeing us, they had determined to return to Morfa for a fortnight for change of air.

My mother read the note aloud, and then threw it carelessly on the table. It did not surprise her as much as Nesta and I felt that it ought to have done.

"Poor Rosamond!" she said, "Lady Helen does quite right to take her back to Morfa if she is at all unwell; there is nothing like Morfa air. I wish, however, they had told me sooner they were going; I should have asked Rosamond to take charge of a parcel for Hilary. Those shirts Nesta has just finished would not make a very large parcel. Let me see; they don't go till to-morrow. Would there be any harm—"

"Yes, a great deal of harm. You must not think of such a thing," interrupted my father. "You seem to forget, my dear, that Hilary is Mr. Lester's land-agent, and that Miss Lester is not exactly the person who can be expected to convey his shirts to him."

"I am sure she would be very glad to do anything for

him," answered my mother, quickly. "And, indeed, my dear, it is you who forget; you speak as if Hilary had no more right to be considered at Morfa than any one else. I believe that Rosamond sees things in a much more proper light, and feels how dreadful it is to be keeping Hilary out of his right place."

"Well, we will hope so," said my father; "but I advise you to take the proper feeling for granted, and not test it in the way you propose. Lady Helen's hospitality made a show till it was tried. Well, well! she is gone. Let her go in peace, and not come back again to trouble us. You will be much better and happier at home on Tuesday evening, children—a great deal better, if you will only believe it."

It was trying to have so little sympathy, but I could have borne it if we had been quite alone—if Mr. Armstrong had not been sitting with us when the note arrived. The most provoking part of the disappointment to me was that he should be present to witness our discomfiture. Ever since his discovery of my little pictures, he had shown (as I considered) an undue interest in what he chose to call our approaching introduction into the world. He had seen us once or twice engaged in hemming the muslin flounces, and he affected to consider me so pre-occupied with the prospect of gaiety, that it was necessary for him to put me in mind of every particular of my usual duties for my father.

I could believe that my father might have good reasons for rejoicing over the postponement of our long-expected pleasure, but I considered that only innate hardness of heart could account for Mr. Armstrong's showing a like, or even greater satisfaction. How could our going or not going possibly affect him? I took an opportunity of expressing this conviction rather strongly before the evening was over, and thus found a vent for some of my ill-humour.

"Why," I asked, "should it please him to see me disappointed and unhappy? Was it not very ungenerous to show me such marked unfriendliness, when for my father's sake we were obliged to work together? I acknowledged freely, that I knew I was a much less agreeable partner in work than Hilary had been, but since our companionship could not be helped, might he not, with advantage, take more pains to conceal his dislike to it?"

I made these accusations hastily, and was hardly prepared

for Mr. Armstrong's defending himself from them with greater earnestness than was at all usual with him. I suppose the little burst of pettishness relieved my mind, for I remember I was happier after my quarrel with Mr. Armstrong than I had been before. It gave me something fresh to think about. During the course of our dispute that evening, it dawned on me for the first time, that in spite of all his independence and professed abhorrence of sentiment, Mr. Armstrong did care a little about other people's liking—nay, that even my liking and friendliness was of some little consequence to him. It must have been the strangeness and unexpectedness of the discovery that made me turn it over so often in my mind.

CHAPTER XI.

“Place your hands in mine, dear,
With their rose-leaf touch;
If you heed my warning,
It will save you much.

“Ah! with just such smiling
Unbelieving eyes,
Years ago I heard it;
You shall be more wise.”

A. A. PROCTER.

WE heard of Rosamond Lester's and Lady Helen's arrival at Morfa from Hilary, and then a long time passed without our receiving further news of them. May passed into June—a hot glaring June. My father found the bright sunshine very trying to his eyes during his long walks through the streets, and his mornings in the close school-house. For his sake I began then, first, to wish away the sunny June days, and to feel glad that another had gone, each evening, when I wheeled his arm-chair to its summer-place by the open window, and prepared for the hour's reading aloud, which my father called the crowning hour of his day. Even Hilary seemed to have been made lazy by the hot weather. He not only neglected to answer my mother's repeated questions

respecting Rosamond's health, but wrote shorter and less satisfactory letters than usual. At last, a whole week passed without his writing at all, and my mother began to be uneasy. Nesta and I tasked our ingenuity every morning to find reasons for his silence, generally without much success. A tolerably sufficient reason happily suggested itself to me on the sixth morning of disappointment. I reminded my mother that it was haymaking time in the country, and she tried to comfort herself with the belief that we could not reasonably expect Hilary to find time to write, while such pressing country business was going on around him.

She entertained us with stories of haymaking times in her childhood for nearly half-an-hour after our father had left us; then she went upstairs, and Nesta got out her work, and I took down a book (Wraxall's "History of France" it was) for our usual morning's historical reading. I was not much in the mood for reading history that morning. The pictures which my mother had been painting for us of the sunny upland meadows, where the merry haymakers were now tossing the sweet grass, and listening to delicious sounds of dashing mountain torrents, were pleasanter to contemplate than the misdoings of kings and ministers. I turned over the leaves idly, trying, meanwhile, to talk myself into a better frame of mind.

"Look, Nesta," I said, "how much we have read during the last three weeks. These hot days favour reading by keeping people at home. It is comfortable to know one has the whole day before one, secure from visitors."

I had hardly said the word, when a knock was heard at the door—a quick tremulous knock—that somehow startled us both.

"There, that comes of injudicious boasting," cried Nesta. "Well, to confess the truth, I am not sorry to be interrupted."

"Only if we don't finish the volume before Charlie comes home, there is no saying when we shall finish it," I remarked, shuffling up the book with our mark in the page. No saying, indeed! I have that book still with the mark where I shut it in that morning. I could never persuade Nesta to listen to another word of it. Her girlish book education ended then.

"Who can our visitors be?" asked Nesta; "they are long

in coming upstairs." So long that at last, fancying that I heard voices talking in the hall, I went out of the room to look over the banisters. The dining-room door was just closing, and our waiting-maid came up to me and announced that a gentleman wished to speak with Miss Janet in the parlour. A fear that some accident had happened to my father on his way to the school—a constant fear of mine, presented itself at once to my mind. I ran down the stairs I hardly knew how, and dashed into the room. I did not meet the face I had expected to see, and a feeling of relief came before astonishment. "Hilary!" I cried. "Is it you, Hilary? Oh! I am so glad. But how is it that you have come so suddenly; without warning us? Is anything the matter? What is the matter?"

The last question came tremblingly, when he had turned his full face to me, and I had taken in its stern sad expression, which never changed or lightened at sight of me. I had my arms round his neck before he found voice to speak.

"Oh, Hilary, tell me what has happened. Papa—"

He disengaged himself rather hastily. "No, no; it is nothing that concerns any of us; don't agitate yourself. I have come up to London on business."

The words fell coldly upon me—as words of Hilary's had never done before. We both remained silent for an instant, standing a little apart on the hearthrug; then Hilary spoke again, not looking at me, but fixing his eyes on the window-curtains opposite.

"Janet, Rosamond Lester is dangerously ill in typhus fever. The doctors have given her up—they say she is dying!"

I suppose I uttered a cry of dismay, for his next words were—

"Hush! don't make a noise about it, there is no occasion for that. I want you tell me how soon you think my mother can be ready to start with me for Morfa. I have come to persuade her to return with me. Rosamond—Miss Lester, was delirious when I left the house; but ever since the fever began, ten days ago, she has done nothing but ask for our mother. She cannot bear the sound of Lady Helen's voice; and, indeed, Lady Helen is too frightened of the fever to be of the slightest use; she has returned to London with me to-day. Mrs. Western is not much better. If Rosamond can be

saved it depends on my mother to save her. How soon do you suppose she can be ready?"

It was so unlike Hilary to make a plan concerning our mother without thinking first of her comfort and pleasure, that, even with his suffering face before me, I could not help expressing my surprise.

"But, Hilary," I said, "how can you propose to carry mamma off to Morfa in this sudden way? How do you know that she will go with you at all?"

"She will come with me. Janet, tell her I am here; bring her down to me; we are wasting precious time on which life or death hangs!"

I walked trembling to the door; before I reached it Hilary came to me, and stooping down (he had grown such a tall powerful-looking man), left a cold grave kiss on my forehead.

"Don't frighten mamma," he said, in his own kind natural voice, "and yet be quick, Janet."

I was glad of that injunction, for it gave me an excuse for hurrying my mother downstairs before she had time to ask questions.

She did not see the trouble in Hilary's face as I had done; she only saw before her, alive and well—grown strong and handsome, too—her darling, her wonderful eldest son; her eyes were too full of happy tears to note, at the first moment, more than that. Hilary's face changed as she hurried up to him; the fixed stern look left it, and, instead, came that nervous quivering of lips and eyes, which in him, I knew, was a sign of strong feeling, strongly kept down. I left him to make his request to my mother as he best could, and went to enlighten Nesta as to what was going on.

She and I had only half exhausted our exclamations of sorrow at Hilary's tidings, when my mother joined us. There was a pink flush on each cheek, and a bright light in her eyes, but she did not look agitated or nervous. She was far more composed, indeed, than she would have been if I had brought her news of a downfall of soot from the drawing-room chimney, or a serious breakage in the kitchen.

"My dear children," she said, stepping up quickly to the writing-table, "I am going to write a little note to your father; Hilary will take it to the school, and bring your father home with him."

As soon as the note was written, she sent me down with it to Hilary, who was waiting impatiently at the hall-door. When I returned to the drawing-room I found her with a bunch of keys in her hand, giving directions to Nesta about the management of the house during her absence.

"You must help me, my dear children, to think of everything," she said, "for Hilary says he cannot give me more than three hours to prepare. Janet, dear, I have been telling Nesta that Rosamond Lester is dangerously ill in typhus fever, and Hilary thinks I ought to go and help to nurse her. She has done nothing but call for me ever since she was taken ill; and you know I am, after all, her nearest relation—the poor motherless child!"

"And you really mean to go?" I asked.

"Hilary seems to wish it very much—to have set his heart upon taking me with him. I could not bear to send him back alone, disappointed, to that neighbourhood where the fever is. I should never have another happy moment—and Janet, dear, I have only three hours to prepare; you must help me to think of everything that can be wanted, and not puzzle me with questions."

Thus, putting all doubt aside, my mother steadily turned her thoughts to the business of the moment—she, who ordinarily could not make the smallest decision without difficulty, astonished us now by the strength and calmness she showed. Her head was clear for every detail of the packing, and she gave strangely minute directions to Nesta and me for the conduct of the house while she was away. Her box was packed and corded; Nesta was writing a direction for it, and my mother herself was smoothing out the strings of her bonnet, when my father and Hilary returned together. As they entered my mother's room I thought my father and mother had certainly changed characters that day, for his face expressed all the agitation and bewilderment I had expected to see on hers.

"My dear," he said, addressing my mother, "what is all this that Hilary tells me? I do not understand him; he seems to think that you are going to return with him to Morfa immediately. It seems to me a most preposterous idea—a most inconsiderate scheme!"

"Has he not explained to you," my mother answered, quietly continuing her work, "that Rosamond Lester is

dangerously ill, and that he thinks I ought to go and nurse her?"

"*You!*" my father cried, and his voice rose, trembling a little with anger, as we had never heard it since the days when Hilary's stupidity or Charlie's carelessness used to irritate him in lesson hours. "You!—and why are you to be called on to leave your home and family to nurse Mr. Lester's grandchild? What claim has Rosamond Lester upon you, that for her sake you should risk a life that belongs to me and to your children?"

There was a pause, my mother sighed gently, and my father turned to Hilary.

"But I blame you most," he said. "Mr. Lester might make such a request; you ought to have felt too much care for your mother to bring it. Do you value her life so little that you can endure the thought of her risking it for a person who can be nothing to you in comparison?"

I expected to see Hilary overwhelmed with trouble at this severe rebuke—he used to be so very sensitive to blame from my father. It was not so; the expression of his face did not change, the hard stony look seemed to have settled upon it; and he answered in the same set voice he had spoken in all the morning—

"*'Nothing to me!'* I never said she was. But there can be little risk of infection in a house like Morfa. I do not believe my mother would suffer."

"*Little risk, you believe!*" cried my father, impatiently.

There was silence again for a minute, and then Hilary, who had been leaning against the chimney-piece, with half-averted face, stood upright, and looking at my mother, said solemnly—

"It is a matter of life or death. Mother, decide at once; there is no time to lose. If you cannot return with me I shall go alone, but I think your coming to her is her only chance."

His very lips grew white as he spoke; no other part of his face had a shade of colour to lose. I believe my mother thought he meant that it was a question of his own life or death—and, indeed, there was that in his face that might have excused the thought—a look of quite wild terror came into her eyes. She caught one of Hilary's hands, and held it fast.

"No, not alone; you must not go alone. Charles, Charles, look at Hilary! I cannot let him go away alone!"

Only that once did I ever hear my mother call my father by his Christian name. It brought him to her side, and in a moment she was weeping on his shoulder, and he was soothing her, calling her gentle names—Ernestine was one. How strange it sounded to hear him called Charles and her Ernestine! Names which seemed long since to have passed over to us young ones. I do not know how long it was before we all grew more composed, but when my mother raised her head, and wiped away her tears, no one seemed inclined to make a question about her going. It was taken for granted that she was to go, and we all turned our thoughts to making such arrangements as would spare her fatigue or add to her comfort on the journey.

The time fixed for their departure came too soon. We all felt, however, that it was well to have a short leave-taking, and I tried to believe, that in hastening my mother away, Hilary was only showing his knowledge of what was best for her. I think, indeed, that she would have broken down quite at the last, if he had not been standing by her with his pale grave face, and if he had not interrupted her second request that we would write that very evening, by saying, "Mother, we shall be too late. You must get into the carriage now, or there is no use in your going at all."

My father went and shut himself up in his study after they had gone, and Nesta sat on the stairs, and had a good cry.

When it began to grow dusk, I stormed the door of the den, armed with a cup of strong coffee, and had the satisfaction of being allowed to sit on a volume of Basnage at my father's feet, while he took his coffee, but all my subsequent attempts to interest him in any of our usual occupations for leisure evenings, met with a gentle "Not to-night, my dear."

I contented myself at last with keeping my place by his side in silence, for more than an hour, receiving now and then a gentle pressure of his hand on my head, to assure me that my presence was not forgotten. If it had not been for that, I think I should not have felt justified in staying near my father in the dark, for he had a way of talking aloud to himself whenever he had been unusually agitated, repeating a verse from the Bible, or a sentence from a favourite author, which often enabled me to trace the course of his thoughts.

That evening, I remember, he said over two or three times

a verse of Keble's, which I had read to him some Sundays before :—

“ Oh vain and selfish sigh !
Out of the bosom of His love He spared,
The Father spared the Son for thee to die.”

“ For me—for an enemy,” my father murmured ; “ and I spared so grudgingly. The old enmity rose up in my mind, the old jealousy—not dead yet, after all these years. Oh ! what depths of sin unsubdued. ‘ The body of this death.’—selfishness—that is death ; the spirit of sacrifice, true life. Janet, my child, how does that verse go on ? there was something else in it I liked, when you read it to me.”

I repeated :—

“ Are there who sigh that no fond heart is theirs—
None loves them *best* ? Ah vain and selfish sigh !
Out of the bosom of His love He spares,
The Father spares the Son for thee to die ;
For thee He died, for thee He rose again ;
O'er thee He watches through His boundless reign.”

“ Oh vain and selfish sigh ! ” my father emphasized when I had done. “ Selfish and how vain.”

“ Papa,” I said, encouraged to speak a thought I had previously had in my mind, “ do you know, I was surprised when I found that Keble had written that. I should have thought only a woman would have had such a thought—that only women sigh *that* vain and selfish sigh.”

My father smiled, and then hastily put his hand on my head, and drew me closer to him.

“ My child—Janet,” he said, “ how came you to have thought about it at all ? You have your mother and me ; you are in a safe warm nest of love ; child, I cannot have you looking beyond that yet. I dread that morbid dissection of the feelings. I have suffered enough for all of you. Is not my love great enough to keep your heart warm ? ”

“ Oh yes ! yes ! yes ! ” I said. “ Papa, I shall never want any one but you ; but I did not know before—how could I ? you are so much greater than I—I did not know that you *cared* for all my love.”

There was a short silence, and then my father said, “ Janet, I have spoken wrongly ; I have made you say something that cannot be true. My love is not enough to satisfy your heart ; no human love can be. There is only one perfect

enduring love in which the heart can live and rest. That is God's love. Some people learn this when they are young. They are the happy people; to them all other loves come with a blessing, safe and sweet—may you be one of these! Others *will* try everything else first. They make earthly homes for the hearts, and they are starved out from one after other—starved out or driven out, naked, wounded and cold—happy, if at last they find a safe home in the great Heart of God. Hide your heart in His, Janet, now, while it is unwounded, unseared. I cannot keep it safe for you, my child, but I would make the experience I have bought help you, if I could."

I had seldom seen my father so much moved, or heard him speak so strongly. I am afraid I was more occupied in wondering why he spoke as he did, than in resolving to profit by his counsel. Safety and peace were by no means the possession I coveted then.

After a little more talk, my father dismissed me to the drawing-room, saying that he feared Nesta would weary of being so long alone. The drawing-room was nearly dark when I entered it, and the sound of a low moan coming from a recumbent figure on the sofa, startled me. I was surprised that Nesta should continue to grieve so bitterly, and reproached myself with having left her so long.

"This will never do," I said, coming up to her, and putting my hand on her shoulder; "what would mamma say if she saw you?"

The person whom I had addressed slowly raised her head from the pillow where it had been closely buried, and answered in a faint voice, "It is not Nesta—it is I—Lady Helen Carr. I have been sitting with your sister; she has just left me to look for you. I came to hear whether your mother had gone to Morfa or not; I could not rest till I had heard."

"She left us at three o'clock," I answered, rather coolly. I could not help feeling angry with Lady Helen; if she had not been so helpless, our mother would not have been wanted.

"She is very, very good," Lady Helen said, fervently.

If she had not announced herself, I should hardly have believed that the faint humble voice could be hers. A minute afterwards the passing of a lamp-lit carriage through the street cast a moving light into our room, which seemed to pass from the sofa to the wall, and then vanish.

Lady Helen started, and caught my hand. "What was that?" she asked, nervously.

"Only a light passing in the street," I said.

"Only a light?—how foolish and nervous all this has made me!—only a light!"

She burst into a strangely sounding fit of laughter as she finished speaking—laughter which shook her whole frame, and which broke out again and again, more uncontrollably as she tried to check it. I had never seen any one in hysterics before, and as I had not the least idea how to act in such an emergency, it was a great relief to me when Nesta returned to the room.

She seemed to know by a sort of intuition what to do. Her simple remedies were efficacious after a time. Lady Helen gradually grew calmer; the painful laughter subsided into sobbing tears, and she lay back on the sofa, quiet, but exhausted, and almost fainting.

It was then very late, past eleven o'clock, and Lady Helen still seemed so unequal to any exertion, and so reluctant to return to her solitary house, that Nesta entreated her to remain and spend the night with us, suggesting that she might, if she pleased, rest on the bed in our room, while we sat by her to keep her company.

To my surprise, Lady Helen caught at the idea. It was too good of us to have her, she said; too good. She had rather stay in any corner—anywhere, than go back alone to that house where Rosamond had been so lately.

The mention of Rosamond's name brought a fresh flood of tears, and to prevent our father becoming alarmed or impatient, Nesta was obliged to hurry Lady Helen upstairs, and employ all her arts of soothing to induce her to compose and settle herself for the night, while I dismissed our wearied servants to bed, and brought the long strange day to a close.

I had left Lady Helen to Nesta's care during the greater part of the evening, for I could but allow that she was more equal to the charge than I; but when she seemed disposed to sleep, and the house grew still, I persuaded Nesta to go and lie down in Charlie's vacant room, and insisted on taking the night-watching as my share of the labour.

There was something exciting to me, and rather pleasurable than otherwise, in the thought of sitting up all night. I established myself in the old nursery arm-chair at the foot of

our bed, and warded off attacks of sleepiness by watching the curious shadows cast by the night-light on the wall, and recalling every event of the past day, that had transported my mother to Morfa, and made Lady Helen an inmate of our house. My duties as sick-nurse proved very easy, and I suspect that I must have succumbed to drowsiness at last, for I remember starting up from my chair with a sort of shudder, just as the grey summer dawn began to creep into the room, and feeling very much surprised to find myself out of bed, and with all my clothes on.

As I watched the light increase, and heard the noises of day begin, everything seemed so familiar and usual, that I began to fancy I must have had a long dream, and could not refrain from softly withdrawing the curtain at the foot of the bed, to assure myself, by the sight of Lady Helen's face on Nesta's pillow, that my recollections of yesterday were real.

It was not a very judicious movement ; I only held the curtain up for one minute, but in that minute a level ray of sunshine fell upon my patient's face, and woke her.

She started up with a bewildered look in her eyes, that made me fear a repetition of last night's scenes, but when she spoke I perceived she was quite herself, by the pettish tone in which she addressed me.

"Why did you wake me? I might have slept an hour longer, a whole hour longer; how could you wake me?"

I begged her pardon contritely, and besought her to try to sleep again.

"Sleep again! I suppose you can sleep when you like; it is a long time since I could. No, don't draw the curtains close, and move about on tiptoe. The mischief is done now. You had better make the room cheerful by letting in all the light you can, and come here and talk to me."

"Is it wise of you to excite yourself by talking?" I asked.

"Talking will excite me less than thinking. I will not say what the result will be if I lie still, looking at that white curtain, and thinking till it is time to get up. There, get into the bed and rest yourself, and let me have a face near me to look at, that will keep me from seeing *always* as I did yesterday, the death-stricken face of that poor child at Morfa."

"You did love her after all, then?" I said, as I arranged

the pillows to support my patient comfortably, and humoured her by resting on the bed by her side.

"Love her! I don't know, I have been bitterly sorry before now, to lose people whom I always said that I hated while I had them."

"But you did not hate them; mamma says that you care much more for your friends than you profess to do; that you make out yourself less amiable than you really are. I wonder why you do that, it prevents people liking you."

"Not at all; most people are disposed to believe the contrary to what they are told; you must *praise* yourself if you wish to be disliked thoroughly. Poor Rosamond Lester, however, took me at my word. Her dislike to me is a mania—an inherited one, perhaps. I can talk of it quietly enough to-day, but yesterday, I thought I should never cease hearing the agonized tones of her voice, when, in her raving, she intreated her nurses to keep *me* from her. I don't think I have ever done anything to deserve such dislike as that. I wonder if Shafto would drive me away from his bed if he were dying? whether, if all my friends were delirious and spoke the truth, they would say the same?"

"No, no," I cried, "it could be only the unreasonableness of illness, which made poor Rosamond dislike to have you near her. Her wish to be nursed by mamma is just as unreasonable; she has only seen her twice, and cannot have real affection for her."

"Perhaps not, but I have always thought that her love to your mother is part of her dislike to me. She has heard some foolish gossip which makes her fancy that I have taken your mother's place in her grandfather's favour, and interfered with her claims upon him."

"I did not know that she had any," I said.

"But your mother is Mr. Lester's nearest relation after Rosamond; if Rosamond dies, she will be his heir, and he is one of the richest men in England; have none of you ever thought of that?"

"No, and we will not think of it now, for Rosamond, I hope, is not going to die. She will recover, now that my mother is going to nurse her. Should you dislike to tell me how her illness began, and whether you and she had been quite good friends before she was taken ill?"

"Ah! I see you are curious. No—I should not dislike

telling you. I should like you to know the whole, and to show you how my feelings towards the poor child have been for some time past gradually growing more kindly. It was never my fault that we were not happy together : I have always tried to overcome her prejudice against me. For her grandfather's sake, and perhaps also a little for my own, I should have been glad if we could have been good friends. Her grandfather always hoped that I should take the place of a mother to her ; indeed, he used at times to indulge in plans for her future which would have made the relationship between us real. I never shared them ; even had I thought it possible that Rosamond might be won by Shafto, I should have had no hope of his doing so worldly-wise a thing as trying to win her. I expected that the very fact of her being an heiress would set him against her. I never had a greater surprise than when I read his first letter from Morfa, and found it full of praises of Rosamond, of her originality, her spirit, her nobility of character—I don't know what fine things Shafto did not find in her. At first I believed that he praised her out of perversity, because I had predicted that they could not live peaceably together for a week. It was not till they came to London, and had been some time in the same house with me, that I allowed myself to believe in their mutual liking. I do not deny that I was happy then, happier than I had ever expected to be again ; to see my son married to the heiress of Morfa would indeed be a triumph to me. I said nothing, however ; I tried not to interfere in any way. Mr. Lester wrote to me that he considered the marriage as all but settled. He had never had any other wish for his granddaughter's future ; and though it gratified his pride that she should be admired and noticed wherever she went, and that many should seek her, he had made up his mind long ago who was to win her. I was more uneasy than he lest her head should be turned by the homage she received, and not sorry when she made a slight illness an excuse for running away from London in the very midst of her success. I never saw her more amiable than she was during our journey to Morfa. She and Shafto were like two children, so glad to get out of the town. Their gaiety infected me—I never remember being so happy or feeling so good. How little I thought what was coming ! Before we had been a day at Morfa, I happened to learn that a bad

infectious fever was rife in one of the miners' villages near. I have a very great horror of fevers, a peculiar horror. I knew that Rosamond had a bad habit of going in and out of the poor people's houses, whatever they might have the matter with them, and that she usually heard of their ailments from your brother, who always seems to know when any one is ill. I thought it only a wise precaution to write and ask him not to tell her of the fever in the village, and, I added, that if he were likely to be exposed to infection, he had better keep away from the hall for a time. I expect he thought me very interfering, for he never answered my letter, but rather exaggerated my caution—not only keeping away from Morfa, but avoiding us pointedly when we met at church, or on our rides. It was ill-judged, for it made Rosamond fancy that something was wrong. I don't know how she found out my little *ruse* at last; I suppose she met your brother in some place where he could not avoid speaking to her, and that she questioned him. I am sure he would not have told her about the fever, if she had not asked some direct question. I dare say he made the best of it to her, but she chose to be bitterly angry with us all for keeping her in the dark; she insisted upon it, that the people had been neglected through our selfish fears, and she would go to Tann y Coied the very afternoon that she had heard there was illness there. She went from house to house wherever sickness and death had been; she tired herself out, and when she came home excited herself by quarrelling with all of us. The poor wilful child! she could not forgive what she considered interference on my part. To punish me, she would not even speak to poor Shafto, though he was innocent of all offence, and did not even understand what we were all disputing about. The next day she sickened. She would not allow she was very ill at first, but soon she could conceal it no longer; it was evident that she had taken the fever in its very worst form. She has youth on her side, otherwise there would be little hope. Poor child! poor child!"

"But, Lady Helen, I like her for going to see the sick people. It is right to run such risks. You don't blame mamma for going to Rosamond now that she is ill."

"No; I admire her, but I wonder at her, and at your father for permitting it."

"Hilary wished it so much—I understand why. He felt, or

fancied, that he had led Rosamond into danger. That accounts for his extreme sorrow. I rather wondered at it before."

"*Extreme* sorrow? You were surprised, then, at the concern your brother showed?"

"I was surprised at his being so anxious to take mamma away into the neighbourhood of an infectious fever. I hope she will be safe. How terrible it would be if she were to be taken, or Hilary, or your son! Are you not very anxious about your son? Why did not you make him come away with you?"

"I could not have made him. And, my dear Janet, you should not put such terrible fears into my head. You certainly are not a judicious nurse for a nervous patient. Is not that your sister's gentle knock at the door? How good of her to come so early!"

It was Nesta, bringing two cups of tea, which, early as it was, she had prepared for Lady Helen and me, to refresh us after our night's watching. Lady Helen welcomed her kindly, and showed such a decided preference for her company, that I thought it better to leave them together, and slipped away to seek my father and cheer him with a good report of our guest.

CHAPTER XII.

"To wander all night long, without a sound,
About the fields my feet oft wandered once :
The larches tall and dark, which do ensconce
The little churchyard, in whose hallowed ground
Sleep half the simple friends my childhood knew."

OWEN MEREDITH.

WE did not receive any letter by the midday post, and as Lady Helen was distressed at the prospect of prolonged suspense, my father invited her to stay with us till the next morning, when we might confidently reckon on a full report, from my mother, of the state in which she had found her patient. I hardly know how the day passed. Lady Helen found occupation for Nesta in waiting upon her, and I wished the hours away.

I took it as a proof of the reality of Lady Helen's anxiety, that she rose the next morning in time to join us at the

breakfast-table before the post came in. When the postman's short quick rap was heard, Lady Helen was more moved than any of us. Her lips turned white, and she caught hold of the table to steady herself. Since the boys had left home, my mother had become a voluminous letter-writer. We had no fear that she would fail us. There was a thin letter to my father, which he patiently put aside, meaning, as I knew, to make it out painfully and slowly when he was alone. Another well-filled envelope was directed to me. Lady Helen sighed as she saw one closely-written sheet drawn out after another. Compassionating her impatience, I began to read aloud.

"DEAR CHILDREN,—Hilary and I arrived safely, and are not the worse for our hasty journey. Please tell papa often how very well we both are. You perhaps all thought that dearest Hilary looked pale, and unlike himself, when you saw him. I fear you will have been making yourselves unhappy on his account, so I begin by assuring you that he is well, and that I don't at present see any reason to suppose that he has taken the fever."

Lady Helen groaned, and I skipped several sentences, and, beginning on the next sheet, found myself in the midst of minute directions as to what we were to do if our father should be taken ill, interspersed with cautions about the safe putting out at night of the gaslights and the kitchen-fire. At length, on a third sheet I saw Rosamond's name, and, beginning at the commencement of the sentence, I read boldly on :—

"It is very strange to be writing all these cautions to you, my darlings, while I sit watching by the side of Rosamond Lester's bed. She has been in a tranquil sleep for the last hour, while perhaps I am wanted at home ; and yet, dear children—though I can hardly bear to think of your missing me, though I wonder every minute how everything looks at home—I cannot be sorry that I came, for I feel that I am wanted. I don't want to blame the people here. I am sure it is because they know no better ; but it does go to my heart to find how little common sense and common self-denial have been shown by this poor child's nurses. It is very sad for a girl to have no mother. Poor Mrs. Western indeed has done what

she could, but she is inexperienced, and at best, I should fear, a helpless person. I have had a very busy night and morning, but now, in the afternoon, I am resting, and enjoying this talk with you. Dear Hilary is, I trust, lying down. I find he has not slept for several nights. I comforted him some hours ago, by giving him a favourable report of our invalid. This sweet sleep is a great gain. As I stooped over the bed just now she smiled, as if she were dreaming pleasantly. I think she will know me when she wakes, for even before she slept she used to turn towards me when I spoke, as if the sound of my voice pleased her. We must not be too sanguine, however. She is already very weak, and the doctors fear that, when the fever leaves her, she will sink from exhaustion. I am thankful to say I do not share that fear. I have told Hilary so. I trust I am not raising false hopes. Hilary is to stay at Morfa Mawr as long as I am here. That is an inexpressible comfort to me. I have just stolen softly into his room and found him sleeping. Rosamond Lester also still sleeps. I cannot close my letter with better news.

"Your most loving mother,

"ERNESTINE SCOTT."

Lady Helen listened anxiously to every word, and was the first to speak when I ceased reading.

"I think—I trust—it is good news," she repeated more than once.

Nesta and I were eager in our assurances that it was, and we dwelt with hopefulness, which grew into certainty, as we talked, on every favourable point in our mother's letter. My father and Lady Helen shook their heads over some of our happy predictions, but I think they liked to hear them, and were somewhat infected by our hopefulness before the break-fast-hour was over.

During the course of the day, Lady Helen returned to her own home. She wished very much to take Nesta with her, but our father would not permit it. When he returned from afternoon school, and found our unexpected guest departed, he was inhospitable enough to express great satisfaction; and he made Nesta rather angry by predicting that we should not see her again, or hear more of the sudden affection she professed to have conceived for us.

In this, however, he was mistaken. During the following

weeks, Lady Helen called at our house frequently ; sometimes to take Nesta out for a drive in the country, oftener to sit an hour with us in the evening, and hear the news we had received in the morning's letters from Morfa. We usually read our mother's letters aloud a second time to our father in the evening. Lady Helen frequently contrived to be present at this time, and showed such an eager interest in every scrap of Morfa news, that we felt it would be unkind not to let her share our mother's minute account of each day's progress. For some days the reports of Rosamond's health were very variable ; now the symptoms were favourable, and then there had been a relapse, and life or death again hung in the balance. Our mother, through having to watch and guard her patient with intense unresting anxiety—to fight, as it were, for her very life—was drawn day by day to regard her with a protecting motherly tenderness, such as she had never hitherto given to any one out of the home circle. The first letter, which did not refer wholly to the concerns of the sick room, was written a few days after the crisis of the fever had passed, when Rosamond's ultimate recovery was considered secure. I remember it, because it described persons and places with which we had much concern afterwards ; and it interests me to look again at the first picture of them which my mother drew with delicate, minute touches for us :—

“I have now been a fortnight at Morfa, but I must not tell my dear children how very long the time has seemed to me. To-day I went out for a little walk, after the doctor had given a comfortable report of our dear child. I feel quite as if she were my child now ; this fortnight of waiting on her and watching her, and trembling and praying for her, has made her mine. I hardly liked to leave her for an hour, but the doctor insisted on my taking the air ; and I had promised Hilary to attend to his directions. Hilary wished to take me out for my first walk, but knowing how busy he is, and how little time he has to rest, I did not like to trouble him, and so managed to slip out alone. I have often fancied how I should feel if I ever went to Morfa again—if I ever saw again the hills and the woods and the fields that I have so often described to you ; but, dear children, it just shows how foolish it is to picture things to one's self : I have seen them, and it has not been to me at all like what I fancied it

would be. The air was very pleasant, and the smell of the flowers in the gardens refreshed me ; but if I could have had my way, I would rather have walked down Baker Street and looked in upon you all, and assured myself that you are as well as you say, and found out what was being prepared for your father's supper to-night. I trust—I do trust—that everything is going on well with you at home ; but I have promised not to be over-anxious, so now I will tell you something about my walk. The house itself and the gardens in front are quite changed ; they do not recall any old recollections. Instead of the smooth bowling-green, with the two great mulberry-trees at the end, which used in my time to stretch down to the little river, the entire valley is now cut up into innumerable garden-beds. The hill-sides are laid out in terraces, with marble steps leading from one to another. It is all very grand, but I think our quiet garden, shut in with smooth green hills, was far prettier. I should hardly have known I was at Morfa while I stood at the front of the house, which looks eastward. On the western side, however, fewer changes have been made, and I soon found my way to a broad grass walk very much retired from all the rest of the garden, which used to be one of my favourite play-places when I was a child. It still has, I am glad to say, on one side the old hedge of hazel-trees dividing it from the kitchen-garden, and on the other the low ivy-covered wall I used to climb. From this wall one gets one's first view of the sea. I walked up and down for a quarter of an hour there to-day, and enjoyed extremely the smell of the sea and the feeling of the springy turf under my feet. It made me feel so young and enterprising, that I ventured to leave the garden by a gate at the end of the walk, which, I remembered, led by a steep wooded descent to a well which we used to think held the sweetest and coolest water in the country side. I wondered whether the well would still be there, and whether I should find the tin cup and chain I used to be fond of letting down into the well and hauling up when I was a child. I found I was not so young as I once was, when I tried to scramble down the hill-side. I wondered how I ever managed to dance down as I once did ; but I dare say Nesta could do as much now. When I came out from among the trees to the little opening in the wood where the well is, I was startled (the place used to be so lonely) to find a visitor

there before me. A young man about Hilary's height, but much slighter, was sitting on the edge of the well, actually amusing himself as I used to do, by drawing up water in my old tin cup, which was still fastened by its chain to the top of the well. He did not drink the water when he had drawn it up, he let it drip slowly back again from the vessel; and he did this several times over, as if he liked hearing the sound of the water-drops splashing into the well below. I used to do the same thing when I was very little, but it was strange to see a grown-up man amusing himself in such an idle way. His back was turned to me, and as there was no space for me to come to the head of the well while he was there, I was obliged to stand still till he moved. I was determined to go to the well, for I spied a small jug lying on the grass, and I thought I would fill it with the very cold well-water and take it to Rosamond. At last I grew tired of standing (it seemed as if he would never be tired of lifting up and letting down water), so I made a stir among the leaves, and then he started up and saw me. I felt sure—I don't know why—but the instant I saw his face I did feel sure, that he was Lady Helen's son. He seemed to know me, and came forward very pleasantly to ask after Miss Lester, and say how glad he was to see me out. He has a very pleasant manner which surprised me. I had made up my mind not to like him, because I fancy, from one or two things, that he is not a favourite with Hilary. Hilary is right, no doubt, yet I thought the earnest way in which he asked after Rosamond, showed that he must have a good heart. He filled the pitcher with water for me, and would carry it to the house himself. He advised me not to climb the steep ascent again, but to prolong my walk by taking a winding road round the hill which leads to a point in the valley, where, he said, I should see the new church which Mr. Lester (by Hilary's advice) is building for the Tann y Coied miners. Mr. Carr showed me the road, so we had quite a long walk and talk together. Like Lady Helen, he talks more openly and more about his own thoughts and feelings than people generally do. I don't mean that he told me about any particular feelings of his own, only in a general way he spoke as if he did not think any one could be really happy, and even as if he were not quite sure that we ought to rejoice so very much, for Rosamond's own sake, that her

life is likely to be spared. I said I was sure it would not have been spared unless it was really good for her to live; and then I repeated what I have often heard your father say, that he could not think it right to look forward so exclusively to the joys of heaven that we could not receive thankfully the good things our Father has prepared for us here.

"When I mentioned the joys of heaven, he looked surprised, and said, 'Oh, you misunderstand me. I was not thinking of heaven, but of throwing off the weariness of life—its littleness, its doubts, its noisy strife; and of sleeping peacefully in some such spot as that.'

"We had come in sight of the new church as he spoke, and he stopped to point out to me the field sloping up the hill-side, and still full of wild flowers, which has been marked out for the future churchyard. As we looked, he told me some story about a young poet (I had never heard his name before) who used to say, during the last few months of his life, that he longed to feel the flowers growing over him. I told him I thought that a very foolish speech for a poet to make, for he must have known that *he* could never feel the flowers: *he* would not be in the grave while his body was being turned into flowers; he would have gone to God to render his account. I said I never liked to hear people speak in that way of death, as if the grave and what became of the body were any important part of it.

"Mr. Carr looked at me earnestly as I spoke, as if he wanted to see if I really felt what I said; then he made some answer about envying people who could speak certainly—who felt as if they knew. I was too much surprised to answer. Is it not sad, dear children, to think of a man as old as Hilary, who is said to have such great talents too, being still ignorant on such important points—doubtful about simple plain truths that he might have learned in the catechism, and heard over and over again at church ever since he was a child? I felt very sorry for Mr. Carr as we walked the rest of the way rather silently together. He does not look as bright and happy as a young person ought to look, or talk as sensibly as one would expect; and yet there is certainly something nice about him.

"But here I am at the end of my paper. In looking back I am surprised to see how much I have written about Mr. Carr. You will not think it tedious, because you like to hear

every little thing that interests me. He has interested me, he is such a very different person from what I expected to see."

The next day's letter contained the following passage :—

"I have had such a delightful walk with Hilary. The dear boy pretended to be jealous because I had taken my first walk with Mr Carr ; so I gave myself a longer holiday than I should otherwise have done, and let him take me down to the sea-shore. It certainly is a great treat to me to walk with Hilary, and how it did put me in mind of old times ! Hilary is just the height that my dear father was. I have to stretch up my hand to reach his arm now, and he has the same way of walking—the light springing step and the habit of looking about as he walked, that my father had. On our way to the shore, Hilary called an old shepherd from a field to remind him to fetch in a flock of sheep from Salt Marshes before the tide turned. I did not remember the old man's face, but he recognised me, and began to lament over the old times, as elderly people naturally do. He said the place had never looked like itself since the old master died, and he had had no comfort in it till young Mr. Hilary came three years ago, to put them in mind, by every word he spoke, and every look he looked, of them that were gone. He would have said more, but Hilary cut him short, rather roughly, I feared.

" 'Come, Griffith,' he said, 'enough of that. I have told you twenty times over that I am no more master here than you are. Mr. Lester is your master and mine, and you are an ungrateful old humbug if you pretend that you have anything to complain of. Go back to your work, and take care those sheep are safe on the uplands in less than half an hour.'

"When we were out of the old man's hearing, Hilary spoke gravely to me about not encouraging the people to remark upon his likeness to his grandfather, or to speak as if he had any special right to be at Morfa, or were likely to remain long there. I asked him where else he thought of going, and he said, "the further away from Morfa the better." Then he began to walk over the sandy waste land that leads down to the sea, with such quick strides that I could not have kept up with him, if he had not now and then stopped to knock off the head of a thistle with his stick, or to trample down a dandelion-flower that would soon have been

sending its seeds into the cultivated fields—just as my father never forgot to do, however deeply he might be thinking. Of course, it made me unhappy to see him disturbed, and to hear him talk of going far away from Morfa. I wondered whether it was any pain to him to walk over fields that had belonged to his forefathers, and be, as he had said, a servant there instead of the master. I began to turn over in my mind all the comforting things I might say to him, but by the time we reached the shore, the disturbed look had left his face, and he was his kind self again. He made me sit down in a sheltered spot on the dry, white sand, and we had, what we used to call when you were children, a Sunday talk. Ah! dear children, there is no happiness in the world like what a mother feels when her grown-up son, who has been long away from her, talks to her out of the fulness of his heart, and she feels that there is nothing in it that need divide him and her; that though he may be stronger and wiser than she is, he is as much her own, as good, and as true as he was when he was a little child. I can't tell you all Hilary said, but you will like to hear a little. He blamed himself for having been so much disturbed, and for burdening my mind with cares for his future, when we ought both to be too much absorbed in gratitude to God for sparing Rosamond Lester's life to think of anything else. He said he had not thought of anything else till that old man's speech had wakened a selfish pain, which he hoped he had conquered. From the hour when I had told him we might consider the danger over, till then, he had felt as if he were treading on air; everything out of doors—the wind and the sea, and the waterfalls, seemed to be shouting for joy. He said I could not understand how painful it was to be dragged back to thoughts of himself, and of how little he really had to do with Morfa, and with the people whose lives he has shared for the last four years.

"When we had finished talking about Rosamond, he made me tell him how I liked being at Morfa. He feared that the sight of the old places might have brought painful regrets for the old times. I assured him, as I now tell you, dear children, that it has not brought any pain to me. I used to think it would. Now I could laugh at myself, and wonder that I never found out before how much better and dearer the present times are than the past. I told Hilary, as I once

before told you, Janet, what a trouble it was to me when he was born, to think that he would never live at Morfa, and how I fancied it was impossible for him to be happy in any other place. Now I begin to see how little happiness depends on outward things ; as one gets older, as one sees the end, one learns to smile at the violent wishes of one's youth, and to see that, after all, it has been easy enough to do without a thing that once seemed necessary to one's very life. Dear Hilary put his arm round my neck and kissed me as I said this. He told me I had comforted him, and done him more good than I knew. He would remember my words, and try to believe that a time would come when he, too, should smile at the violent wish of his youth.

"As we were leaving the beach, Hilary pointed out to me a grassy ledge, nearly at the top of a steep rock, on the southern side of the bay, and told me that Rosamond Lester once climbed up to it to bring down a poor little mountain lamb that had fallen from the top and broken its leg. To look at the steep sides of the rock, one would think only a sea-bird could reach the ledge, but Hilary assures me that Rosamond not only climbed up, but brought down the lamb in her arms. Hilary was riding on the sands, at some distance from the head, when he saw something white fluttering half-way up the rock. He tried to persuade himself that it could not be a person's dress, and happily he did not get near enough to recognise Rosamond till she was within a few yards of the bottom. He must have been much frightened, however ; for even while we were talking, the recollection of the danger she had been in, agitated him so, that he put his hands over his face and shuddered.

"Nesta will like to know what became of the lamb. I asked, and Hilary told me that Rosamond carried it home and cared for it till it was quite well ; then she took no more notice of it, and it was sent away to the Morfa Bar farmhouse. It is now a great lazy sheep, Hilary says, and it has a troublesome habit of following him about wherever he goes. He calls it troublesome, but he confesses that he always has a lump of rock-salt for it in his pocket, and that he has never left off the habit of feeding and caressing it. Is not that like Hilary ? It would be impossible to him to leave off being kind to any creature he had once protected, however ugly, or old, or troublesome it grew."

My next extract is from a letter dated a week later :—

“I have been thinking, Janet, how much easier it is for some men to be amiable when they have to do with women, than when they are in each other's company. Mr. Carr, now, is really always very pleasant when he and I are together. To me he is almost humble, and when I am obliged to find fault with things he says, and to give him a little lecture, he takes it so prettily, as if I had a right (as I have not) to find fault. I cannot say, however, that his manner to Hilary pleases me ; indeed, to tell the truth, I quite dread being in the same room with Mr. Carr and Hilary. They always *will* talk, and yet they never by any chance get into a conversation that does not become an argument. Hilary means well, I know, yet I must confess there is a want of kindliness in his way of treating Mr. Carr, that I cannot understand. He will sometimes fix on some remark that Mr. Carr has made (a foolish, high-flown speech, perhaps), and go on all the evening talking about it, showing its absurdity in his downright, matter-of-fact way, till I do not wonder that Mr. Carr grows contemptuous and angry. When he is really roused (and I must allow that he bears a great deal without disturbing himself about it) he can say very cutting, scornful things. The words often don't seem to mean much, or at least I don't catch their meaning ; it is the contemptuous expression on his face that distresses me. To-day, I am sorry to say, they had one of these foolish quarrels. It began about a little bit of stone wall that divides two fields behind Morfa Bar farmhouse. A briar-rose had crept up this wall, and quite a garden of wild flowers had taken root in a lodgment of earth on the top. Mr. Carr pointed out the flowers to me one day, when we were walking together, and he stood still for more than ten minutes, counting the different colours on that one piece of old wall. He said it was worth all the gardens at Morfa Mawr, and then, in a laughing way, he tried to coax me into making a solemn promise that I would not betray the existence of this wild garden to Hilary.

“I did not mention it, for I really forgot all about it ; but Hilary's sharp eyes spied it out, and, of course, he set a man to work immediately to clear away the weeds. Mr. Carr reproached him with what he called this barbarism, when they met to-day at dinner, and they had a long discussion. I felt

that Hilary had done quite right ; for, as he says, the flowers would not have stayed on the wall ; they would have sent their seeds all over the fields, and cost the farmer I don't know how much labour to root them out. But I wish he had justified his own doings without expressing such disdain for Mr. Carr's taste, and showing so plainly that he thought his arguments in favour of the weeds because they are beautiful, not only very foolish, but even selfish. Mr. Carr did not say much in answer, but what he did say pained and puzzled me extremely. He spoke as if he thought it were a question of right and wrong—something to do with religion—but such an odd sort of religion ; I could not understand him. He spoke of people making a display of building churches for the service of God, while, by destroying all beauty in the world, and looking at it only as a place to make money in, they were rendering the true worship impossible. He implied that we all worshipped ignorantly—'we knew not what ;' and that he, because he spends his time in mooning about the country admiring the colours of wild flowers, and the damp stains on old walls, is a more religious man than Hilary, and in a better state of mind. He has a strange way of quoting words from the Bible, so as to make them mean just the contrary to what one has always thought they meant. It is very distressing to me, and I wish every day that your father were here to set us all right. My uncle takes no part in these discussions. I am afraid it amuses him rather to see the two young men grow angry with each other. In his heart he must agree with Hilary, but I think he has the same sort of admiration for Mr. Carr that he used to have for Lady Helen in the old days, when a word from her would make him do anything."

The next letter began :—

"To day is to be a great day. The doctors have given leave for Rosamond to be removed from her bedroom to a sitting-room on the same floor. She is to be wheeled across the passage in an arm-chair, so as to have as little fatigue as possible. Mrs. Western and I have just finished dressing her ; she looks very weak, but I think even prettier than when she was in health. Her short hair curls in such pretty dark rings all over her head, and her eyes look so very large and bright. She must naturally be very energetic ; even now, so feeble as she is, she speaks and moves in a quick, impetuous way. Often when I am waiting on her, she lifts up

her face and gives me such a vehement kiss, that I am not surprised at her lying back quite exhausted after it. When she says 'Thank you !' it is said with all her heart, with an emphasis that makes the two words mean more than a hundred of another person's. All the servants in the house, and the poor people round, love her. It is pretty to see what a festival they make of this first day of her leaving her room. The servants seem not to know how to make the house look beautiful enough. And as for Hilary—but that is Hilary's rap at the door ; he is come to wheel the arm-chair to the boudoir. A little shake or fright might be very injurious to Rosamond just now, and, of course, there is no one so thoroughly to be trusted as Hilary, so strong and so careful.

"It is evening. Rosamond is once more in bed, and I have leisure to finish my letter. I have been reading over what I wrote this morning. How little one knows at the beginning of the day how it will look at the end ! This has not been quite such a bright day as it ought to have been—at least, not to me. I am vexed with myself, for something I have done has annoyed Hilary. You will remember what I told you about my visit to the well, and that Mr. Carr good-naturedly carried a jug of water for me up the hill. Since that day he has always brought or sent me that same jug full of cool well-water, and it has been very useful, for Rosamond likes that water better than any other. I might have asked a servant to supply me with water from the well, but I let Mr. Carr bring it, because he seemed to like doing so. I may have been wrong, but I did not know it at the time. It came to be an understood thing between Mr. Carr and me, that he was to render us that one little service, and the water came regularly till this morning, when I fancied he had forgotten it. Rosamond missed her morning draught, and I had planned to send for it as soon as she was settled in her room. However, the first thing we all noticed in the boudoir was a very pretty basket standing on Rosamond's work-table. It was filled with the prettiest, greenest moss, and buried in it was the little jug, so full of water that the moss dipped in it. It was like a miniature well—so fresh and cool, it made one long to drink. Rosamond was much pleased, and, with more strength than I thought she had, she sat upright in her chair, lifted the jug out of the basket, and began to pour some water into a glass. Then she stopped to say how much good

it lid her, and how kind she thought the person who had remembered her whim about this water every day. I fancied she looked at Hilary as she spoke, and I said, as I was surely bound to do, that she had to thank Mr. Carr for this little kindness, and that I did think it considerate in him to be so punctual, for he was not naturally a thoughtful person. There was nothing startling, I am sure, in my way of speaking ; but it was ill-judged in me to speak to Rosamond at all while she was holding the jug in hand. As might have been expected, her strength failed suddenly. Her poor weak fingers lost their hold on the handle. Down came the jug on the floor, and the water was splashed all over her dress. The accident caused some confusion. Rosamond's dress had to be changed, and by the time this was done she was so much fatigued, that she could not enjoy the fresh room. She had not a word for her grandfather or Mr. Carr when they came to see her, but lay with her eyes shut nearly all day, and cannot, I fear, have benefitted much by the change of scene. The worst to me, however, is, that Hilary is disposed to blame both Mr. Carr and me. The accident in itself was a mere trifle ; yet it must have seemed serious to Hilary, or he never would have spoken as he did to me. Stay, I do not mean that he said anything disrespectful ; he only expressed strongly his opinion that I was to blame in admitting Mr. Carr to so much intimacy. He did not know, I am sure, how much his saying so would pain me. Hilary has just been with me. Oh, my dear children, what a wonderfully good, tender heart he has ! He cannot forgive himself for what he said to me to-day. One would think, to hear him talk that he had said something very wrong, whereas it was nothing. Surely, as I have been telling him, he had a right to express his own opinion. He says, No : he had no right to have a wrong opinion, and it must be a wrong opinion that blamed me. I have had quite a task to comfort him. He has promised me to go to bed and to think no more about it ; but I heard the front door close just now, and I fear he has gone out to wander about in the open air. I know he has a very tender conscience, but I do think it strange that he should have been so much agitated by what happened to-day. He spoke as if he had hardly been himself since that unlucky accident. I trust he is not over-working himself, or that he is not beginning in the fever."

That is the last letter which I remember reading out loud in our quiet evening conclave. The day after its arrival, we were surprised by a second invasion from Morfa Mawr, which revolutionized our little world as completely as the first had done.

On coming home from our evening walk, Nesta and I learned that Lady Helen and Mr. Lester, who had come up from Morfa to spend a day or two with her in London, had called and spent an hour with our father during our absence. It was a real disappointment to Nesta and me to lose this chance of hearing the latest news of our mother and Rosamond; for our father was never a good person from whom to glean information at second hand, even when he was in his most talkative mood. On this evening our close cross-questioning seemed to worry him even more than usual. He was not cross, but he was evidently pre-occupied. After prayers he took me with him into the den to read over some exercises, and when my task was finished, I did not wish him good-night, for I saw he was by that time in a mood to talk to me.

"Janet," he began, when I had settled myself in my favourite place on a pile of dictionaries at his feet, "what a strange thing it is to see how one character acts upon another in the same way all through life. I have been accustomed to think myself a tolerably firm person, yet to-day I have fallen again under the influence of a will which, in old times, I found to be stronger than my own. A person, who has no right to control me, has come and informed me quietly of plans which he has formed for the disposal of myself and my family during the next few months, and I have found myself helplessly acquiescing in them. It is very humiliating: it shows how little years have improved me."

"Papa, what has Mr. Lester persuaded you to do?"

"Ah! you are anxious, and want to bring me to the point at once, Janet. Now, I make a long preamble, because I am doubtful how you will look when the tale is told. Come, I will take courage. My Janet is a sensible lassie; she knows that when a thing is done it is done, and that there is no use in making the worst of it."

"I will make the best of it."

"Thank you, my wise child, my counsellor. Well, Janet, you shall hear the whole story from beginning to end—my hopes first and then the disappointment.

"Since your mother left us I have been constantly thinking how we might gain from her hasty journey some advantage for her and you. She likes Morfa, and if she could have some of you with her, I think a prolonged visit there would do her good. I had planned to write to Hilary, and tell him to look out for some pleasant farmhouse near the sea, to which your mother might have gone as soon as Miss Lester could spare her. Then, as soon as the vacation commenced, I should have sent Nesta and Charlie to join her there, while you and I—"

"Well, papa?"

"Ah, Janet! that was the cream of the plan. I thought I might have realized a day-dream in which I have indulged for several years. I meant to have taken you with me to Edinburgh to visit my relatives and old friends there. I should like you to see Dr. Allison and his family. They, and one or two others I could name, would not like your dark face the less because it is so much like mine. Besides, Dr. Allison is, you know, a celebrated oculist, and, knowing something of our family constitution, and having averted the evil I dread from some of us who were threatened with it, he fancies—But I don't agree with him," my father said, interrupting himself, and putting his hand to his eyes. "In my case there is nothing to be done. Patience and submission—nothing but patience and submission."

"But everything ought to be tried," I said. "Papa, if that was your plan, I will not make the best of your giving it up."

"Stay, Janet; *that* is not the project from which I have been dissuaded; I had given up all thoughts of your and my journey to Scotland before I saw Mr. Lester. Read that letter, Janet, and you will understand why."

It was a short letter from Charlie's college tutor, enclosing the bills for the Easter term. I should not have been much wiser for looking at the items of a few words in my father's large scrawling hand at the end, had I not noted that the sum total was a hundred pounds more than he had calculated upon. I understood my father well enough to know that any expression of indignation against Charlie would only aggravate his pain. I could not think of any reasonable excuse to make for Charlie's conduct, so I suppressed all remark upon it.

"Will *this* make it quite impossible for you to travel to Scotland, or to take lodgings at Morfa?" I asked.

"Quite impossible."

"Could it not be managed for Nesta and Charlie to go to Morfa, and stay at Morfa Bawr with Hilary, while mamma remains at the Great House? There would only be the expense of the journey, and it would be such a delight to mamma. You and I could be happy at home together—very happy. You know you have promised to teach me Hebrew; I have quite made up my mind to learn, however much Mr. Armstrong may laugh at me."

"Well, Janet, that was just the arrangement I had thought out; I had determined that you and I, the two strong ones, should take the necessary privation on our broad shoulders, and smooth the way for the others as well as we could. I honour you, you see, my counsellor, by giving you the hardest lot. Do you like such honour? It is what God often gives to His dearest children."

"Yes, I do, I do. Papa, that is an excellent plan—you must not change it."

"But I have changed it, and I want you to help me to find out how I came to be so foolish."

"Never mind that now. Let me hear what you and Mr. Lester have plotted."

"Nothing very formidable. I have given up my intention of sending Charlie and Nesta to Morfa, and at Mr. Lester's and Lady Helen's joint request, I have promised that they shall accompany Lady Helen to her country house in Norfolk, and stay with her two months, while your mother prolongs her visit at Morfa."

"I wonder what makes Lady Helen and Mr. Lester wish this?"

"Mr. Lester is anxious to keep your mother at Morfa, and Lady Helen away, as long as his granddaughter's health requires that she should be humoured; he thinks your mother will be content to remain from home if her family is dispersed, and that Lady Helen will bear the solitude of Broadlands better if she has companions to amuse her. She professes to have taken a great liking to Nesta."

"And Nesta has a sort of liking for her. I dare say that she and Charlie will be happy at Broadlands. I don't see why it should not prove a wise arrangement. You and I shall still be together. We will make the best of it, papa."

"Thank you; but you suppose that you were forgotten."

Lady Helen said she hoped that you would join your brother and sister at Broadlands after the school holidays began : she knew I could not spare my secretary in term time, she said."

"Did she suppose I would leave you alone in the house?"

"No, Mr. Lester invited me to spend my holiday at Morfa with your mother."

"To travel down to Wales alone?—what an idea! I would not let you," I exclaimed.

My father sighed gently; "Everybody does not watch me as closely as you do, Jenny; and you know what I feel about concealing one's infirmities—I mean refraining from troubling one's neighbours with useless complaints about them. Perhaps you, and I, and George Armstrong, are the only people who quite understand how little I am to be trusted to take care of myself. Well, there is consolation in that thought, for before the day of total darkness comes, my practice in helping myself under difficulties will have prepared me for it."

"But you will not run needless risks?"

"No, and I agree that travelling alone would be a needless risk. Since I can't afford to take these eyes with me," touching mine, "I will stay at home. Now, go to bed, dear child."

I went, more full of my father's last words than of anything else he had told me. As I slowly mounted the stairs, a happy thought suggested itself to my mind.

We had been visiting Mrs. Wilton that evening, and she had entertained us with a long account of an accident that had befallen her son, a boy of ten years old, and with lamentations that, in consequence of it, he would be kept prisoner to the house during the rest of the half-year, and lose all the benefit of his school lessons. She wished very much, she said, that she could hear of a tutor or a governess who would undertake to carry on her son's studies till the end of the term. The difficulty of the case seemed to be that Master Wilton had a will of his own, and his mother feared that while he continued too much out of health to attend the regular school classes, he would strongly object to receive instruction from any tutor she was likely to find for him.

Now the young gentleman and I chanced to be firm friends. I had often helped him to prepare his lessons, and, girl though I was, I knew he had considerable respect for my scholarship. I had no fear but that we should get on well

as teacher and pupil; and I felt sure that Mrs. Wilton would be delighted to have my help. Why should I not offer to act as Arthur Wilton's teacher till the end of the half-year, and so earn enough money to enable my father to take the journey to Scotland on which he had set his heart? Before I had reached the top stair, my thought had become a fixed purpose, I had seen exactly how I should carry it out, and resolved that my father should know nothing of what I was doing till I was able to place the money I had earned in his hands. The thought made me so light-hearted that I was able to represent the new plans to Nesta under a much brighter aspect than I had seen them a few minutes before, and by dwelling long, and chiefly on the happiness which the success of my scheme would certainly bring me, I succeeded in reconciling her to the thought of leaving me alone at home while she went out into the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

" 'Tis the place, and all around it, as of old, the curlews call,
Dreary gleams about the moorland flying over Locksley Hall;
Locksley Hall, that in the distance overlooks the sandy tracts,
And the hollow ocean-ridges roaring into cataracts."

As soon as letters could be received from my mother and Charlie, my father had the comfort of finding that his plan received the fullest approbation from both.

My mother was glad that Nesta should enjoy the pleasures of a country visit, and Charlie hailed joyfully any arrangement that put off the evil day of explanation with my father. My own private scheme prospered too. Mrs. Wilton received my proposition gratefully, and my father gave me permission to spend my mornings during Nesta's absence at Mrs. Wilton's house, without troubling himself to ask any explanation of my request to do so.

Lady Helen fixed her departure for the fourth day after Mr. Lester's visit, so that the hours which drifted Nesta and me to our first parting were so full of occupation, that we had no time to grow sad over the thought. Nesta's

resemblance to our mother appeared in all the wonderful little arrangements she made to secure those who were left behind from missing anything of her usual service.

Lady Helen called for Nesta early in the day fixed for their journey, and an hour after they had left me I betook myself to Mrs. Wilton's house to begin my first day's teaching. I was glad to get away from the solitariness of home, and to have my thoughts diverted from mourning over Nesta's absence, so I entered on my new occupation with a good heart. I do not deny that I met with some unlooked-for difficulties ; but, on the whole, I got on as well as I had expected, and never had any cause to regret my undertaking. My pupil was a clever boy, and anxious not to fall behind his class-mates. When he found that my explanations really did make his work clearer to him than he had ever found it before, he left off throwing obstacles in the way of his own progress, and resigned himself to his fate with a better grace than might have been expected from a schoolboy compelled to submit to the indignity of being taught by a woman.

My first afternoon's labour enabled me to meet my father on his return from school with a consciousness of having been well employed, and with the bright spirits that always attend such a feeling.

My father's surprise at my gaiety at the conclusion of such a trying day, and Mr. Armstrong's evident approbation of it (he thought I was making a great effort to be gay for my father's sake) afforded me much secret satisfaction. I went to bed reflecting on the still greater surprise I had in store for him, and bravely shutting out with this thought the longing for Nesta's sweet presence, which would come on this first night that we had ever slept under separate roofs.

Nesta's first letter to me was written on the evening of her journey ; it is very like herself :—

"DEAREST LOVE,—Do you remember a story you read aloud to me when I was making the skirts of those spotted lilac muslin dresses we wore two summers ago ? I hope you do, for, if so, it will save me a deal of description in this letter. I quite forget the title of the book, and everything about it, except an account of the heroine's visit to an old country house, and of her being placed to sleep at night in an out-of-the-way, oddly furnished room, where she fancies

all sorts of horrors are going to happen to her. You will remember the story, and from it you will be able to imagine what I should be feeling to-night if I had not taken out this sheet of paper and fixed my eyes upon it, and resolved to think about you, and nothing else. Since I wrote that sentence I have broken my resolution ; I have lifted my eyes from the paper and looked round. Yes ; this is a very out-of-the way, strange-looking room, and there is something strange and forlorn in the appearance of the whole house. There are no carpets on the broad slippery oak-stairs ; the balusters are too large for one's hand to hold, and, I think, but I am not sure, that the cornices have grinning faces carved upon them. The passages are very wide and windy ; the doors are mostly covered with faded green baize, quite worn out at the edges, so that when they slip from one's hand they fill the whole house with sound : a whisper however will suffice for that. The house has been quiet so long that the very walls and the floors are tired of silence, they don't know how to make enough of a noise when they have one, but go on repeating it for ever. My bedroom is quieter than the rest of the house, at least the boards don't creak *much* as I walk about, and the door shuts easily ; but when I listen, I can hear a very dismal noise, caused (so the housemaid tells me) by the wind moaning in a great alarm-bell that hangs in a turret in the roof. A stray little breeze must have got inside this bell one windy night a hundred years ago ; it can't find its way out again, so it has been making that little fretful moan ever since. I wish it would go to sleep for one night.

"Three steps lead down from the passage into my room. I confess it feels very like going down into a well. The walls are panelled and hung with dark Chinese-pattern paper. The chimney-piece is of dark carved oak. I can't make out all its oddities by this light, but I can see that the supports are two mermaids, with battered faces, shining black bodies, and scaly tails. There is an Indian cabinet against the wall, and the article of furniture that is serving me for a desk is a great oak chest—perhaps the very one that swallowed up 'Lovel's bride : ' it, too, is curiously carved, and has a grotesque open-mouthed face looking at me from its centre. Now, beloved, you know the sort of place I am writing in ; so I will begin to tell you the events of the day.

"I wonder how you have got through this whole day without me to look after you? When I had left you this morning, and we were settled in the railway carriage, and had started on our journey, I began to think rather dolefully of all the little things in which you and dear papa would miss me, and to vex myself lest I should have left anything undone that I might have done to save you trouble. These thoughts made me rather sorrowful, and I was obliged to look diligently out of the window for more than an hour to prevent Lady Helen asking what was the matter with my eyes. We left the railway train at three o'clock, and drove to a little village inn, where Lady Helen's carriage and servants were to meet us. Lady Helen said she was too tired to continue our journey at once, so we stayed and dined at the inn. After dinner Lady Helen laid down on a sofa and slept, and I strolled round the sunny inn garden, full of broad white lilies and full-blown cabbage-roses and lavender, and then into the village street, where everything was so quiet that I thought all the inhabitants of the place must have settled themselves to sleep for a hundred years. We did not leave the inn till sunset; there was more look of life about the village then. I think I shall always remember how the long straggling street looked as we drove through—the children playing before the open doors of the houses, the women, with their arms folded in their aprons, leaning on the gates of the little gardens, the men sauntering home from their work in the fields, the groups of people leaning over the little bridge at the bottom of the village. I shall always fancy Brancaster a summer sunshiny place, where it never rains or is cold.

"It soon grew too dark to see much from the window, but the drive in the carriage was the happiest part of the day. Lady Helen was very kind, and talked a great deal to me. She described the first journey she had taken on this road, soon after she married, when she was longing to know what her new home was like. She said *that* was the only time she ever wished the way shorter, or thought with anything but pain of the end of it. This house must have proved an unhappy home to her, or surely, its being less grand than she expected could not have made her dislike it as she does. She told me that she always contrives to arrive after dark, because it spares her the shock of seeing at once

how dilapidated the place looks. Her son is fond of Broadlands; he spent his childhood there, while Lady Helen and her husband were travelling abroad. Only think, Lady Helen left her son when he was two years old, and did not see him again for ten years! It was quite dark, so I asked her to tell me about their meeting, and whether they were not very happy to be together again? She laughed, and said that she had looked forward eagerly to seeing her son, and pictured to herself what he would be like, and what he would be to her. She was so excited that her friends dreaded the meeting for her; but when the time came, and an awkward ugly boy was pushed into the room by his tutor, she was so shocked at the sight that she could not help covering her face with her hands.

"Her son snatched his hand away from his tutor, rushed out of the house into the garden, and could not be persuaded to come in again for the rest of the day. The next time she saw him, she said she made a great effort to be motherly, and forced herself to kiss him; but instead of being pleased, he threw himself on the ground and cried for hours. Jenny, I could have cried when she told me this. Can't you fancy how he had been longing for the meeting, and wondering what it would be to have a mother like other children, and how Lady Helen's 'effort to be motherly' almost broke his heart? Yet I think Lady Helen does love her son. She is at least anxious about his future, and sorry that he does not confide in her. She could not help complaining to me about his reserve, and his unwillingness to be advised or guided by her. I wonder whether it would be possible for any one to make them really understand and love each other. What a happy person that would be!—what good it might do them both! It must be some one who loved and admired him very much, and had faith and love enough always to see the best in her, and not to be thrown back either by the strange things she says of herself or the little hard speeches that so frighten me. I can fancy such a person—brave and gentle. I wonder, will Rosamond Lester be all that? I have flown off to Rosamond Lester because Lady Helen did, but I shall not tell you what she said of her, because it is too late to begin on a fresh subject. When we drove up to the house, it was dark enough to satisfy Lady Helen, however anxious she might be to see nothing. I have seen just as much as I have

described to you. Good night, beloved—I long forally have to come and show me this unknown world more plainly if he

Nesta's next letter told of Charlie's safe arrival at B., he lands, and of the high favour with which he was received by his hostess. A week later introduced fresh actors on the scene, and enlarged my knowledge of life at Broadlands.

"DEAREST JANET,—I wonder whether it has been raining with you as heavily as it has done here all day ; if it has, however, I can answer for it, that you have not noticed it as much as we have. You know we were to have gone to-day to call on Sir John and Lady Moorsom, county neighbours of Lady Helen's, who came to see her the day Charlie and I walked to the beach and were late for luncheon. Lady Helen was sorry that I did not see them, and a little annoyed with us for being late. Since then she has talked so much of them, and described so often the beautiful old house, Deepdale Grange, where they live, that I became anxious to see it, and felt foolishly disappointed, when, on getting up this morning, I saw dripping trees, and a wet lawn strewn with the blown flowers of the June roses which ought to have lasted a month longer. They lay like rose-coloured flakes of snow all over the garden, and the sky looked as if it meant to go on raining for ever. Lady Helen pitied me for my disappointment, and said it did her good to see any one young enough to set her heart on having a drive, but when she had said this she went off to her boudoir with her letters, and left Charlie and me to our own devices. Unluckily, Charlie was as much unhinged as I, not about the rain, but on account of some letter he received from Cambridge this morning. He put on his old 'Let me alone' look, which we know too well, settled himself with a book in an arm-chair, and would not speak to me the whole morning. I could not, I am ashamed to confess, think of a single thing to do. I wandered from one window to another, watching the rain-drops dripping from the trees and wishing that it were luncheon time. Ah ! Janet, do you not wonder at me and dispise me ? Well, in excuse for myself that it was not entirely idleness that made me so slow to discover employment this rainy morning, it was partly a curious restless feeling. I can't explain it to you, for I never felt it before in my life ; it was as if something were going to happen that concerned me so particularly

myself

how did I expect to do nothing but wait and expect it. It was my lands' fancy, and, as far as I know, nothing came for all my hering but luncheon time. After luncheon, Charlie went out for a walk in the pouring rain, and Lady Helen invited me to her boudoir, where a fire had been lighted, and made me play and sing to her for a long time; then, seeing I was cold, she told me to bring a stool to the fire and settle myself near her sofa for a fire-side talk. She was in very bright spirits, and she soon began to talk, as she always does when she is happy, about Morfa and the Lesters, about their great riches and the high position in the country which the inheritor of such riches might aspire to, if he were an ambitious and clever man. Then her son's name came into the talk, and she let me see plainly her hope that he would one day be the owner of Morfa. I ventured to ask if he and Rosamond were engaged; I hope it was not over inquisitive, Janet, I don't think Lady Helen was annoyed. She said she believed not—she did not think her son had spoken to Rosamond yet; he was proud, and the fact of her being such a great heiress would make him slow to speak. He knew her wishes and Mr. Lester's, and yet he had never set her heart at rest by confessing that his own agreed with them. She wished he would for once confide in her. If she could but see her son married to Rosamond Lester, and master of Morfa Mawr, she said she would forget all the pains and disappointments of her past life in that crown of joy. Crown of joy was the expression she used, Janet; it set me wondering what I should like to have for a crown of joy to end my life with; and while I built my castle in the air, Lady Helen left off talking and we fell into such deep silence that we were both startled by the sound of carriage wheels coming up to the front door. 'Who can it be?' Lady Helen exclaimed impatiently. 'Who can be coming to us through the rain?' She got up, walked to the window, and walked back, looking disturbed and anxious. I knew quite well what was going to happen, but I said nothing; I felt that it was absurd of me to be so very sure. A moment or two afterwards we heard footsteps coming up the stairs, the door opened, and a tall gentleman entered, who proved to be, as I expected, Mr. Carr. It was odd that I should know he had come, was it not? but then Lady Helen had been talking of him just before we heard the carriage. He walked into the

room quite quietly, not in the eager way people usually have when they return home after an absence. It was more as if he had just come in from a walk. 'How are you, mother?' he said, in the most matter-of-fact way you can imagine. Lady Helen gave him a long look before she spoke, and her eyes grew large and so eager as if she wanted to find out something from his face; then she seized both his hands and said, 'Shafto, what does this unexpected return mean?—tell me at once. Have you brought me any good news?' 'I have brought you nothing but myself,' he answered. 'Then why have you left Morfa? What brought you home?' He drew both his hands from hers. 'My own wish; not, I assure you, any vain hope that my company might be agreeable to you, or that you would welcome me.' A very scornful hard expression came over his face as he spoke. I should have taken a dislike to him then, if he had not, the instant afterwards, seemed so sad and disappointed that I was sorry for him. He turned quite away from us, drew a chair to the fire, and began spreading out his hands to the flames with a languid pre-occupied air, as if he did not expect any one to take further notice of him. Lady Helen sat down too, but I could see by the way in which she squeezed her hands together, that she was trying to keep in angry words. 'I am very glad to see you, Shafto,' she said at last. 'You cannot doubt that; I was merely anxious to be assured there was no special reason for your sudden appearance. Mr. Lester told me that you intended to stay at Morfa all the summer.' 'Did he?' Mr. Carr answered. 'Then he must have known more about my intentions than I did myself. I never could have meant to stay at Morfa all the summer—certainly not.'

"As Mr. Carr said this, Lady Helen got up, walked to the side of the room where he was sitting, and stood behind his chair. 'Shafto,' she began, in a trembling, anxious tone, 'tell me one thing; set me at ease; have you quarrelled with my friends?'

"He turned round with a half-impatient, half-amused smile. 'Quarrelled! no, indeed. I never trouble myself to quarrel with my own friends, why should I with yours? Is not having tired heartily of people reason enough for leaving them?'

"All this time, I believe, Lady Helen had forgotten that I was in the room. You can't think how uncomfortable I was.

I did not know how to recall myself to their recollection, and yet I felt I ought not to remain while they spoke of such private matters. I don't know what I should have done if a servant, bringing Lady Helen's afternoon tea, had not just then entered. The start of surprise he gave when he saw Mr. Carr caused such a clatter among the cups that Lady Helen had an excuse for scolding him, and I an opportunity of slipping away unheard by any one.

"It is now time to dress for dinner ; I shall see Mr. Carr again when I go downstairs.

"Dearest, the evening is over, but I am further than ever from being able to tell you what I think of Mr. Carr. I cannot make up my mind about him, as I should about any other fresh acquaintance, because he is hardly like a new acquaintance to me. I have read his books till I feel as if I knew a great deal about him, while he knows nothing of me. It is a curious sort of feeling. I went downstairs rather dreading the dinner-hour. I expected that Lady Helen would be in very low spirits, and that she would hardly speak to her son. I was quite mistaken ; she came down very nicely dressed, and smiling, and she talked pleasantly all the evening about some review she had been reading. Mr. Carr was rather silent at first, but by degrees he grew interested, began to defend the book which Lady Helen and the review condemned, and said a great many clever, playful things—not witty, exactly, but odd. It was very agreeable conversation to listen to. You and papa would have enjoyed it, but it was company-talk, every word ; and now and then I felt pained to think that a mother and son could talk so on the first evening of their being together, drawing each other out, and applauding each other's witty speeches, like two strangers, or rivals, who were at the bottom a little afraid of each other. There has often been less restraint, and a nearer approach to proper home-talk, when Lady Helen and Charlie and I have been chatting together. I must tell you, too, that I was disappointed in Mr. Carr's manner of greeting Charlie. Lady Helen, Charlie, and I, were assembled in the drawing-room before Mr. Carr came down. Charlie had walked off his discontent, and was in a state of wild delight at the prospect of being in the same house for some weeks with his paragon. As soon as the door opened, he started up and came forward, holding out both hands, and looking so eager and handsome

—you know Charlie's sweetest, brightest look!—I should have thought no one could have resisted such a welcome, but Mr. Carr seemed determined to see no special warmth in it. He looked at Charlie without seeing him, held out his hand carelessly, and made a stupid remark about the rain. Charlie looked as if a glass of cold water had been thrown into his face, and for a moment I hated Mr. Carr.

“Before the evening was over, however, I partly forgave him, for I thought I understood the cause of his coldness. Lady Helen was looking at him with her satirical eyes, and strange as it seems to say so, I believe he is afraid of showing the least bit of real feeling before her. His manner to Charlie quite changed when Lady Helen left the drawing-room for half an hour after tea. He came and sat by him, and talked to him about his college life, and his reading, in a cordial brotherly way, which will, I expect, attach Charlie to him more strongly than ever. I wish I could make you see this manner of his, Jenny. It is so different from Hilary's, or Mr. Armstrong's, or anybody's I ever saw before—so much more winning; it is almost humble, but it is the humility of a person who knows that he is very much thought of, and who is almost sorry to be cleverer than other people, for fear it should pain them. This winning way, however, Mr. Carr only has now and then. He has more changes of manner than any person I ever met. I wonder whether I shall like or dislike these changes when I have seen more of him.

“I will finish my letter by repeating what I can recollect of an argument between Lady Helen and Mr. Carr, which interested me, because I knew that though they seemed to be talking in a general way, they were really thinking of particular people, and implying more in every sentence than their actual words conveyed. It began about the review: the book reviewed is a novel; Lady Helen and the reviewer find fault with it because they say that the author has made everything in the book ugly. The scenery is common-place, and even the heroine is plain. Mr. Carr, at first I fancy, from a love of contradiction, and then in earnest, defended the common-place scenery, and the plain heroine. Lady Helen said that he, being a poet, was bound to worship beauty; and he answered, quite hotly, that he should despise the poor sickly imagination that could not see beauty in every scene, and comeliness in every face, that still remained unspoiled as

God and Nature had fashioned them. A poet should see more, not less than other people, he said, and be less bound by rules. As the argument went on, he seemed to say that he preferred plain people to handsome ones, and flat fields and delves to rivers and mountains. At last he broke out into a tirade against beauty and beautiful people. He said the possession of great beauty vulgarised the mind hardly less than the possession of great wealth; that an extremely beautiful person must lose all generosity of character, through being obliged always to thrust her advantage in the face of others less favoured. He thought a beauty, decking herself out to eclipse other women, almost as insolent as a millionaire who was perpetually trying to convince his neighbours that he was richer than they. When he saw such a one, he said he felt insulted for all the plain women in the world; as if a gage had been flung down, which he was obliged to take up.

"Lady Helen remarked drily, that his opinions had altered very much since they had last talked together; and Charlie here luckily gave a ridiculous turn to the conversation by producing a frightful caricature he had just drawn of Mr. Carr's latest lady-love. It made us all laugh, but when the laugh was over, Lady Helen still looked annoyed, and I am afraid she thought as I did, that mountain scenery and beautiful people, in the abstract, meant, in Mr. Carr's mind, Morfa and Rosamond Lester; and that he was preparing her to find a change of opinion in him respecting both. Good night."

The next letter contained hardly any allusion to Mr. Carr; it was full of details about a drive to Deepdale and a dinner-party there; of Lady Helen's delight at Charlie's successful mimicry of her country neighbours when they returned home, and of Nesta's secret disapprobation of their amusement. Squeezed into the last corner came the following P.S.,—

"Charlie and I begin to think we shall hardly become better acquainted with Mr. Carr from living in the same house with him, than if he had remained at Morfa. Yesterday he brought me a book I had wished to see, but I don't believe he has addressed a dozen words to me since that first evening when we all talked so pleasantly together. He always looks over me, as if he had a vague idea that the space I occupied was filled by something, but he hardly cared to ascertain

by what. Lady Helen and Charlie do not notice his silence; they talk and laugh as much as usual, but it makes me doubly, trebly shy, to know there is a silent person in the company listening to the conversation. It infects the air of the room to my mind. I feel my cheeks getting red every time I have to speak. I wish I could help being so stupid."

A week later came a very closely-written epistle,

"I finished a letter late last night," it began, "and it is only three o'clock in the day; but I shall begin to write to you again, for something has happened that I must tell you. This shall be a journal letter: I will write in it an account of every day. To begin, why did I say that something had happened? How you will laugh at me, Janet! On second thought I find that nothing has happened. I have taken a walk to the shore and come back again, and I have talked to Mr. Carr, that is really all; but in a country house one must make an event of every trifle. You know how one gets to the shore from Broadlands; first, by walking through a wood, and then by crossing a flat, dreary-looking tract of marsh land which stretches from the Broadland woods to the sea. I am not fond of crossing the lonely marsh by myself, and to-day my courage was at a low ebb; so I opened a book I had with me, and seated myself on a stump of an old tree close to the gate which leads from the wood, to rest, and read for half-an-hour; or for the whole morning, if my cowardly fit lasted so long. I did not hear any one open the gate, or pass along the wood path; but when after a time I looked up from my book, I saw Mr. Carr leaning against a tree, just opposite to where I was sitting. He was looking *at* me, not *over* me, that time; he had taken off his cap, and hung it on the gate-post, as if he had been settled there a long time; and he had an open book in his hand. For a moment or two we looked at each other without speaking, and I did not feel it odd, because I have really grown so used to his behaving differently to any one else. At last he crossed the wood path, and stood straight before me, bending down a little.

" 'Miss Ernestine,' he said (I had not supposed that he so much as knew my name), 'I want you to change books with me, and read aloud a sentence from mine. The words are rather uncommon ones, but I think you can make them out if you try very hard.'

"I could not discover whether this was jest or earnest,

Janet ; for though he was smiling, as if some odd thought were in his mind, his eyes were quite grave. I was altogether so puzzled, that I took the book and read aloud one or two uncouth sounding words he pointed out—not once, but several times, as he persisted in teaching me to say them rightly. At last the sound of our voices repeating these unmeaning words struck me as so ridiculous, that I began to laugh heartily. He laughed too, and then sitting down on the grass by my side, he apologised for having interrupted my reading.

“‘But I could not help it,’ he said. ‘I assure you it was a wise precaution. I have been reading about you and your kin in this old book, as I walked through the wood, and when I saw you sitting there I felt afraid of coming near you, till I had made you pronounce the cabalistic words which render it safe for mortals to associate with wood-spirits. Hear what the old Comte de Gobalis says about you. He was considered a very potent sage in his day.’

“He then read aloud a sentence from the book I still held. It sounded great nonsense—about the only safe way of luring sylphs, hamadryads, and gnomes, from the elements, and making them content to live among mortals. The easiest spell was to induce the spirit (having surprised it in a lonely place) to repeat three times the potent word ‘Nehmahnuhah,’ and to combine with it in due form the delicious word ‘Eliael.’ If these were rightly spoken, the mischievous disposition of the eerie creature was expelled, and it became a safe companion ; ‘but wood-spirits,’ the book said, ‘were usually extremely shy of committing themselves to such a rash proceeding.’ Mr. Carr pretended that he had half expected to see me slip down into the tree-stump to avoid reading the potent words. When he had puzzled me by such talk for some time, he told me that the curious old book of necromancy from which he was reading had been a favourite study of his when he was a child, and that he had this morning turned it out from some forgotten hiding-place. ‘Once,’ he said, ‘he believed every word, and spent hours puzzling over the directions it gives for working charms, always with a hope of finding, at last, one that he could practise.’ He read one to me which had caused him many disappointments, because it sounded as if it might be worked so easily. I will copy it from the book for you, Janet.

“‘To attract sylphs, gnomes, and nymphs, you have only

to fill a glass vessel with compressed air, with earth, and with water, and leave it exposed to the sun's rays for a month. After that time effect a scientific separation of the elements, which you will easily accomplish. It is wonderful to see what a charm each of the elements thus purified possesses for attracting nymphs, sylphs, and gnomes. After taking the smallest particle of this preparation every day for a few months, you see in the air the flying commonwealth of the sylphs, the nymphs coming in crowds from the water, and the guardians of hidden treasures displaying their stores of wealth.'

"Mr. Carr said he used to swallow all kind of disagreeable mixtures, and come to the very spot on which we were sitting, and stand staring down the wood-path, half hoping to see the air and the water-people 'coming in crowds.' 'It used to be really a bitter disappointment,' he went on, 'when they never came; so you must not grudge me my recompense of having at last discovered one, in the old spot where I have so often summoned them in vain.'

"I told him that I did not approve of such heathenish rites, and that if there was any danger of air-people lurking in this wood, I would leave it for the open marsh, where, at all events, I could see all there was to be seen.

"Mr. Carr said he would walk down to the shore with me, and prove to me, as we went, that I could not see all there was to be seen, even in the open country; and do you know, Janet, all the time we were crossing the marsh, he kept pointing out to me beautiful things that I have passed many times without knowing they were there. The prettiest thing of all was a swan's nest hidden among the reeds of one of the shallow water-pools, of which there are many in the marsh. I don't wonder now that Mr. Carr loves the country round Broadlands, he seems to know it so thoroughly; he sees something to admire in the shape of every one of the low sand-hills that bound the marsh. Each of the pools is a separate garden to him, and he is never tired of admiring the brown feathery-topped reeds, and the yellow water-flags and silvery willows that grow round them. He says no scenery pleases him quite so well as these flat wide marshes, which look monotonous to strangers, but which are, he thinks, full of change and life to those who know how to look at them. Just as he was telling me this, a heron rose up from among

some reeds close to us, and flew across the marsh to the sea, its long legs trailing like streamers behind it. Mr. Carr's eyes followed it till it was lost behind the sand-hills, and then he looked down at me with a triumphant smile, as much as to say, 'There now, you are convinced : what can one want more than that ?'

"When we reached the shore, he took me to a beautiful little cove among the sand-hills, which I should never have discovered for myself, where there is the richest store of shells. Mr. Carr could not tell me why there are more shells there than in other spots on this coast, but he says he has always found it so. He used to call it his cove when he was a child, and he made a great favour of introducing me to it : he declares I am the first person he has ever taken there. Certainly, no industrious shell-gatherer can have visited it lately ; I had only to sit down and collect the treasures the last high tide had left in heaps on the sand. Mr. Carr said they had been waiting there for me for three months, for it is only in autumn and spring that the highest tide reaches this cove.

"How wonderful it would have sounded to me if any one had told me, one windy day last March, that the waves were bringing up shells to the Broadlands beach *for me*, and that Mr. Carr would help me to gather them !

"We came in late for luncheon, and I fear Lady Helen was rather annoyed about it. She has been a little, just a little strange, in her manner to me this afternoon, and I rather dread the hours that will follow when I leave off writing, and go downstairs. I suppose Mr. Carr dislikes music, for Lady Helen has never asked me to play or sing since he came.

"To-day has been a company day ; Sir John and Lady Moorsom, and their son and daughter, called early, and did not leave us till five o'clock. I thought the time passed pleasantly, but I find that Lady Helen and Mr. Carr were very tired, and that they consider country visits a terrible infliction.

"Sir John is perhaps rather prosy, and Lady Moorsom talks a little too much about her charities in the village. I think I should not like to be a poor woman on her estate ; but the son and daughter appear sensible and kind-hearted. They left us for an hour to visit a poor fisherman's family,

who had lately left their village and settled at Broadlands.

"When they returned, just as we were sitting down to luncheon, some talk arose about the people in the fishing village near here. Lady Moorsom asked Lady Helen if she ever visited them, and Lady Helen answered with the sort of smile you can picture to yourself, Janet—that she really did not consider her manners good enough for such a task. She thought it must require *very* good manners to know how to enter a cottage uninvited, and find out what was being cooked for dinner, and how often the children's pinafores were washed. How did Lady Moorsom manage her visiting? She really should like to take a lesson.

"Lady Moorsom looked puzzled, and Mr. Moorsom answered for her, as I thought, very sensibly. It was not good manners, he said, that were required. Where there was real sympathy and kind feeling the right manner would come, even to people far inferior to Lady Helen in everything but knowledge of their poor neighbours.

"I admired Mr. Moorsom's courage in coming to his mother's help, because I believe it was a great effort to him; all the time he was speaking he was twisting his dinner-napkin into such a complicated knot, that he was employed the remainder of luncheon time in trying to untie it, and his face was crimson for the rest of the day. One good result has risen from the Moorsom's visit: the agreement in opinion about them between Lady Helen and Mr. Carr has made them more at home with each other than they have lately appeared to be. We have had quite a chatty, sociable evening. I wish, however, that Charlie had not joined so heartily in laughing at Mr. and Miss Moorsom, for I am sure they are good people, and they cannot help being plain.

"I ventured to put Mr. Carr in mind of what he had said the other evening, and asked him how it was he did not feel inclined to take up the gauntlet in defence of Miss Moorsom's plainness. He excused himself by explaining that it was only unobtrusive ugliness that he felt called upon to defend. Self-satisfied ugliness was as offensive as self-satisfied beauty. We afterwards drew from him a description of what he considered unobtrusive ugliness; and when he had given it, Charlie protested that he had been describing me. Lady Helen thought, I believe, that I should be hurt, for she

turned the conversation quickly, and looked for a moment rather annoyed.

"*Thursday*.—An old friend of Lady Helen's, a Mr. Vyse, has come to spend three days here : he seems to have known Lady Helen all her life, and to be very intimate with her. I am afraid I shall not like him ; though I can see that he is very clever, and what most people call agreeable. He and Lady Helen talked a great deal during dinner, and I noticed that Mr. Vyse never spoke of any person or thing without leaving a disagreeable impression on one's mind that there was something wrong about it. Whether he professed to be praising or blaming, it was all the same. Mr. Carr did not take much part in the conversation, but every now and then he questioned some statement of Mr. Vyse's, and then a little sharp word-fight followed. They never carried on a discussion long, or let it become quite earnest ; it ended on both sides with a sort of shrug, as if each despaired of the other too much to care to convince him.

"After tea I went into the garden, for I was really tired of listening to conversation I did not quite understand. Before I had been there long, Mr. Carr joined me, and we walked up and down the lawn in the moonlight for about half-an-hour. I have so often felt disappointed in things Mr. Carr has said, so often felt a want, that it was pleasant (for Charlie's sake) to find how much nearer to me he is than Mr. Vyse. He seems to dislike his mocking, indifferent tone of mind quite as much as I do. I wish Charlie did the same. I do not like the part he often takes in conversation here. He says things which I know he does not quite mean, just for the sake of agreeing with Lady Helen, and makes assertions, and laughs at jokes, of which I believe he does not see the true bearing.

"To-night I think I was able to make Mr. Carr see how much harm such careless talk was doing to Charlie—how it was changing him ; and he promised to be careful how he uses the influence he has over him. It was a pleasant half-hour in the garden, yet I regret that I went out to-night. Lady Helen thought it so very imprudent of me to stay so long in the evening air, and said in a meaning way that gave me pain, that she would never have taken charge of me, if she had not thought me a more prudent young lady than I had proved myself to be. If there were not so many beau-

tiful things here, and if I did not feel somehow as if this knowledge of the country were giving me a new life, I should wish myself at home again.

"*Saturday.*—I have felt in disgrace with Lady Helen all to-day, and I don't know how I should have borne it if a diversion in my favour had not been made by Mr. and Miss Moorsom, who called in the afternoon, and were asked by Lady Helen to stay for dinner. I talked a great deal to them all the afternoon and evening, and found it really a relief to chat unconstrainedly, on common-place topics, with plain people, who are not always expecting one to say witty things.

"Mr. Moorsom is a great gardener, and has the finest conservatory in the neighbourhood. He has some rare plants in flower now, and Miss Moorsom proposed that I should spend a day at Deepdale, and be introduced to the conservatories and the village school. I heard her talking to Lady Helen about it, and I saw that Lady Helen looked propitious. How sociable and friendly country neighbours are! I wonder Lady Helen does not like them. Miss Moorsom shook hands with me to-night as warmly as if I had known her for a year. Mr. Moorsom is certainly very awkward. When his turn came to shake hands, he hesitated quite a minute, and then, just as I was going to bow, he put out his large bony hand and gave mine such a clasp, that it quite hurt my fingers. I wish I could make you see him, Janet. He is very tall and broad-shouldered. His face, which would naturally be fair, is burned red with sun and roughened with wind, like a labourer's. He sits down and moves with an effort. Indeed, movement of any kind seems so difficult to him, that when he has once fixed his prominent, very blue eyes on one's face, one feels quite in despair of his ever turning them away again. I don't think he is conscious that he is staring. It must be a habit he has.

"*Sunday.*—Jenny, I have been very happy and very unhappy to-day—happier and more unhappy than I have ever been before in my life; yet now, at the end of the day, I cannot understand either my sorrow or my great joy. It was a bright morning, and when I threw up my window after I was dressed, there was a stillness in the air that made me feel it was Sunday. Every day for the last fortnight there has been a little wind—enough to keep the leaves of the trees in constant motion, and fill the air with sound. I liked

the sound ; but to-day (being Sunday) the stillness pleased me better. It was not perfect stillness. Through it I could catch faint, faint sounds—the stirring of wings, and the buzzing of insects, and, softened by distance, the regular ripple of the waves rising on the shore. The whole world seemed still, but not asleep—only resting. I thought I was going to be happy all day, but before breakfast was over I had a great disappointment. I found that nobody was even thinking of going to church. Lady Helen said it was much too hot for her to attempt to leave the house ; Mr. Vyse said he should walk to the top of the hill to try to get a breath of air ; and Mr. Carr, to my great dismay, asked Charlie to take a walk with him on the shore. I felt that I ought to have said, ‘Charlie, it is Sunday ; won’t you go with me to church first ?’ but oh, Janet ! I was a coward, and I could not say it. I thought Lady Helen was looking at me, and that she might fancy I wished to dictate to other people besides Charlie. The church-bell began sounding at the moment, and for fear of being late myself, I ran off to get ready. The road to church lies through the same wood that leads to the sea. I should have enjoyed the walk on that still, bright morning, if I had not felt so angry with myself, a little with Charlie, and a great deal with Mr. Carr. I thought it so unkind of him to make it difficult for Charlie to act according to his conscience, instead of helping him, as he might have done, by one word ; when I had explained it all to him too—when I had gone out of my way to ask a favour of him ! Yes, I do think it was *very* unkind. I could not blame Charlie much for wasting his Sunday morning. I know how difficult it is to him to refuse Mr. Carr anything. I felt that the person really to blame was the one who had used his influence wrongly. That thought brought a great many other uncomfortable ones into my mind. I began to ask myself if one ought to shut one’s heart quite against people who cannot be trusted to use their influence rightly. Ought one to keep out of their way and trample out every spark of liking ? Or suppose (as is the case between Charlie and Mr. Carr) that the liking had gone on for years—silently, unconsciously, so that the first time it is looked at it is too deeply-rooted to be torn up : would it be presumptuous then, to go on liking and hope to be able to withstand the influence whenever it seemed to lean the wrong way ?

"I was battling these thoughts out of my mind all through the first part of the prayers. I am ashamed to say that I hardly heard a word till the second lesson was read. In it, as you will remember, Jenny, there is that verse where our Lord says, that 'those who deny Him before men, He will deny before the angels of heaven.' I have often heard it read before, but it always seemed to me as if I had nothing to do with it—as if it concerned the martyr-times only; and once I used to wish that I had lived in times when it was possible to confess Christ before men. To-day the words struck upon my heart like a blow, for, Jenny, this very week I have heard Charlie assent to words which sounded almost like denying Christ, and I have not dared to blame him much; for I have felt in my heart that I, too, could be drawn on, by fear of Lady Helen's satire, or dread of seeming dictatorial or unfeminine, not perhaps to deny, but to hide my confession so deep in my heart, that it could do no good to any one. It was then I felt more unhappy than I had ever felt in my life before. I said to myself that I wished we had never come here, and that if I could, without troubling mamma, I would write and ask papa to let us come home again; but, Janet, I felt glad to know that mamma would be so really sorry if I did, that I must not think of such a thing. Yes, and I am very glad now to be obliged to stay, for since that unhappy hour I have been very happy, and all my scruples and doubts have gone to sleep again. I am afraid I shall not be able to make you see the happy part of the day. I do not understand why I liked it so much myself. It was after afternoon church. You don't know yet, Janet, what a lovely time a summer afternoon is in the country—the great heat of the day has passed, the shadows of the trees are growing longer and deeper, and the sunshine is more golden.

"When I came out of church and saw everything looking so beautiful, I was in no haste to return to the house. I thought I would cross the marsh and go round by the shore, feeling sure I should have the beach-walk to myself since Charlie and Mr. Carr had been there all the morning; but, Janet, I was mistaken—I did not have the beach to myself. As I passed the little cove where the shells are, Mr. Carr came out from it (he had been sitting there all the afternoon reading), and we walked home together. At first we talked

about the pretty sights on the shore, the sea-urchins walking with their hundred legs in the shallow pools left by the tide, the gulls floating up and down on the waves, the cormorants sailing heavily from one sand-hill to another. Then by degrees—I don't know how it was, he did not ask me any questions—but somehow, without my being able to help it, I found myself telling him the history of the day; and how I could not feel quite at home with all the beautiful sights he was pointing out, because I was disappointed and angry, with myself, and Charlie, and him. I did not say 'and him,' he said it for me—but he did not seem offended, only very grave and very kind. He asked me one or two questions in a quick surprised way of his, that almost takes away my breath—why I cared so much about Charlie's wasting that one Sunday morning? and what were the words that I had blamed myself so much for not having courage to dissent from? We walked quickly, while he talked quickly; suddenly, he stood still, exclaiming that he was tiring me, and made me sit down to rest on the dry white sand. He sat near me, but for a long time he did not speak a word—he sat letting the sand drip through his fingers and looking out towards the sea: I, too, looked over the sea. It was very pretty just then; the sun was sinking, and the sea looked as if it were crossed by a bridge of gold sloping from heaven to the shore, down which angels might have walked on Sunday evening. That was the time when I felt so happy. I don't exactly know why—I suppose because not having you, it was a comfort to find some one who would listen to my troubles without laughing at them. At last Mr. Carr jumped up, and said we must not forget that we had still a long walk before us. He would not apologize, he said, for being silent so long; I had given him so much to think of, he did not know when the thoughts I had called up would end; he hoped never. As he said this, he held out his hand. I gave him mine, because I thought he meant it for a compact between us, that he would never say anything that could do harm to Charlie. I am sure he will never break the promise of that hand-clasp—do you think he will, Janet? I think it was better, more binding than words.

"Write quickly to me, Janet, and tell me what you think of all that I have said to you. Tell me if you are satisfied with me, and if you can explain my contradictory feeling—so glad and so sorry about such little things."

CHAPTER XIV

"I would not choose
To lack a relish for the things that God
Thinks worth. Among my own I will be good ;
A helper to all those that look to me."

GEORGE MACDONALD.

MEANWHILE the weeks passed on with me in a somewhat monotonous manner. I spent my mornings, and frequently the greater part of the afternoon, at Mrs. Wilton's house. In the evening I read aloud to my father, or helped him to look over the themes and exercises which always accumulated fast during the last weeks of term-time. Mr. Armstrong was our constant evening visitor, and frequently helped me with my work. I don't know how my father and I should have got through those busy days without his help. I should have been very happy if I had not had some anxious thoughts about Nesta, and been disturbed by some doubts as to whether it would be right to persuade my father to go to Scotland, since his absence from home would oblige Nesta to prolong her visit to Broadlands for another six weeks.

The very evening before the happy breaking-up day, I received a letter from Broadlands which greatly increased my perplexity. It came by the late post, while Mr. Armstrong was spending the evening with us, and he good-naturedly offered to finish a pile of exercises, on which I was engaged, that I might have leisure to read my letter at once. I gladly resigned my seat at the writing-desk to him, and retired to my favourite place behind a window-curtain, where I had sufficient light to read my letter comfortably. It proved to be from Lady Helen, and was marked "Private."

"DEAR JANET,—Being much in want of a little rational conversation this morning, my thoughts have turned to you, with a conviction that my desire would have a better chance of being gratified if I had the two Miss Scotts staying in this dull country-house with me instead of one. Now, I know you too well to suppose that you will be pleased with a compliment which implies a disparagement of your sister, and I assure you I do not intend any reflection on sweet Ernestine's conversational powers ; but then, you see, there are times when the pleasantest talker will grow silent. I am in a very

tantalizing position just now: I have the pleasantest companions in the world near me, and none of them disposed to bestow upon me one word. Of course I was prepared to endure a great amount of wearisomeness and stupidity from Shafto, and when he inflicted himself on me during his temporary banishment from Morfa, I gave him anything but a cordial welcome. I should have preferred his taking the unreasonableness and ill-humour incident to his condition, anywhere in the world but to my house; however I was prepared for this. One distracted lover I might have laughed at, but when one's house comes to be haunted by a second, I find myself past laughing, quite ready to scold. Are not you longing to have a key to my enigma? Do I not see the puzzled look on your face, and your eyes glancing up and down the paper?

"To speak more explicitly, then, Ernestine has made a conquest, and one which many more distinguished damsels would have plumed themselves upon. She has probably mentioned my neighbours, the Moorsoms, in her letters to you; but whether she has said more or less about them, I am certain that much of what I have to tell will be news to you. They are connexions of mine, whom I have known, more or less intimately, all my life—thoroughly worthy people, but more to your father's and mother's taste than to mine. The son, who hopes to find himself to Miss Ernestine's taste, is by far the most presentable of the party. Being heir to a very fine estate, all the young ladies in the county, in succession, have tried to catch him in vain; he was supposed to be invulnerable—a sort of wild Orson of the woods, or rather, as we have no woods in Norfolk, of the turnip-fields. The most determined match-makers despaired of him, and I certainly never should have expected that his subjugation was reserved for our quiet Nesta. There was no show of resistance either; he capitulated at once. Before he had been a day in her company, it was evident to all observers that his fate was sealed. Father, mother, and sister, who have hitherto professed themselves ambitious on his account, have now taken the wise course of submitting themselves to the inevitable. The hero himself displays a devotion worthy of other times. If it were not such a common-place phrase, I should say he worships the ground she treads upon.

"He is a shy, awkward fellow, and used to be my beau-

ideal of ungainliness ; but I assure you I have seen his plain freckled face look positively beautiful, from the happiness that shines in it, when fate favours him so far as to give him occasion to perform some trifling service for her. He is thankful from the bottom of his heart when he has an opportunity of picking up her handkerchief or handing her a chair ; but when she condescends to employ his long arm to gather a rose from my trellis, his delight renders him so reckless in his exertions, that, if the courtship lasts much longer, I shall have neither trellis work nor roses left in my garden. I cannot speak with the same certainty of the fair damsel's feelings ; I have never said a word to her : indeed, she is so charming in her unconsciousness, that it would be wicked to disturb her.

" I do not say a word, but I do not shut my eyes, and I see that she is a different creature from what she was a month ago. It may be all country air, but I never knew country air embellish any one so wonderfully. She has more pretty ways than ever : she can now and then say saucy things, and she dances up and down stairs, and sings little snatches of songs, when she fancies herself alone. There are, however, I suspect, showers as well as sunshine in her atmosphere—light summer showers, after which her sweet little flower face holds itself up bright and tremulous, like a rain-washed rose.

" It is a very pretty little romance on both sides, and I enjoy watching its progress ; yet, on the whole, I should prefer that either you or your mother were here to conduct it to its proper termination. I have known girls quite as tender-hearted and gentle as Ernestine throw away the most devoted love, and the best chances of happiness ever offered to them, simply because it came before they were prepared to face the realities of life. I fear lest Ernestine may misunderstand her own feelings when the moment for decision arrives. It will come upon her with a sort of shock, and she will, perhaps, recoil from the thought of settling her life so early. Some one in whom she has been used to confide, and who will guide her to a reasonable course of conduct, ought to be near her. If the last accounts from Morfa had not alarmed me, I should have written to your mother ; as it is, I think it best to spare her additional anxiety, and so open my heart in preference to you.

" If I had had the slightest doubt about Mr. Moorsom's

being thoroughly acceptable to your father and mother, I should not have allowed him to see as much of Nesta as he has done ; but he is in every way so exactly what they would choose for a son-in-law, that, if all goes right, I shall expect a little gratitude.

" How pretty it will be to see Ernestine reigning at Deepdale Grange ; how she will *fête* you all when you come to stay with her there. I consider that your sister's happiness is at stake, so do not fail me, dear wise Janet. With your sisterly advice, she cannot fail to accept the safe, bright lot that is so unexpectedly offered to her. Come early in next week.

" Your affectionate friend,

" HELEN CARR."

Here was a puzzle for me ! I could not bear the idea of reading this letter to my father, for I knew that if he heard it, all hope of persuading him to take the journey to Edinburgh would be at an end, my beloved scheme would have to be given up, and my two months' labour rendered fruitless. I was sure my father would be so much disturbed at the bare thought of Nesta's being stolen away from us, that he would order her to return immediately, and stay at home himself, and keep safe guard over her. Yet, on the other hand, my conscience would not allow me to keep back the letter, and take no notice of Lady Helen's request. If I could go to Nesta I fancied (in my self-confidence) that all would be well, but I must either join Nesta at Broadlands or suffer my father to summon her home.

While I was pondering sorrowfully over this difficulty, Mr. Armstrong finished the exercises and came to join me in the window, my father having meanwhile fallen into his evening doze.

I am not a reserved person, and Mr. Armstrong always had what I used to consider in those days a tiresome habit of finding out when anything had happened to trouble me. I don't know whether my unreserve or his curiosity was most in fault that evening, but certainly before we had been conversing many minutes I found myself confiding to him the hopes I had entertained of being able to persuade my father to visit Dr. Allison during the coming holidays, and my vexation at the obstacle to his and my journey, which had risen so suddenly.

Of course I did not say anything about my engagement

with Mrs. Wilton, neither did I give any reason for my anxiety to join Nesta. I was discreet enough to be silent on those points. When one is perplexed how to act, it is often a comfort to hear a decided opinion. Mr. Armstrong did not scruple to give me one.

"Your father must go to Scotland," he said; "you must not let anything stand in the way. It is most important that he should see Dr. Allison."

"Yet I shall be sorry if Nesta is obliged to remain alone at Broadlands six weeks longer."

"Could not your mother return to London?"

"I fear not, Hilary is so resolved that she shall stay till Rosamond is well. I know Mr. Lester has written to entreat Lady Helen to keep Nesta and Charlie a month longer at Broadlands. I suspect it is only fear of disobliging him that induces Lady Helen to ask Nesta to prolong her visit."

"Will it content your sister if you join her, since she cannot come to you?"

"How can I? Papa cannot travel to Edinburgh alone."

"But he can travel with me. I am going to Scotland in a fortnight. We might arrange to make the journey together."

"You? But you are not going to Scotland," I cried. "I heard you say only an hour ago that you had arranged to take a walking tour among the Tyrolean Alps."

"Within the last hour I have arranged to have a walking tour in the Scotch Highlands. Do you see any objection?"

"Yes, I do. I don't see why you should alter all your plans for our convenience."

"Nor do I; but we are speaking of modifying one. I intend to take a tour somewhere; it is nearly indifferent to me where I go; and if with the pleasure of a tour I can combine the pleasure of serving my friends, why should not I? It is quite simple."

When people will render great services in such off-hand, indifferent fashion, there is no use attempting to thank them. My gratitude was reduced to silence, and Mr. Armstrong began immediately to discuss the details of the journey.

"How soon shall you know your father's decision?"

"To-morrow night, I hope."

"Well, when you are enumerating the advantages of your plan, do not forget to point out the convenience of having me for a travelling companion. Your father's time shall be mine."

I will look in late to-morrow evening to hear what you have done."

The next day was one of those bright days which cannot come often in a life, and which should therefore be made the most of while they are passing, and when memory recalls them in after years.

In the morning I gave my last lesson at Mrs. Wilton's, and took leave of my pupil, with whose progress both father and mother declared themselves to be perfectly satisfied. In the afternoon I occupied myself with writing letters to Nesta and Lady Helen, in which I ventured to hold out hopes of my speedy arrival at Broadlands. During tea-time I drew my father into conversation about his Scotch relations, and by dint of dwelling upon the cordial welcome he would have received from them, and the pleasure he would have enjoyed in their society, I succeeded in making him grumble at the unfortunate circumstances which obliged him to give up all hope of visiting them this year. Then when the tea-things were cleared away, and he was resting in the twilight in his arm-chair, I took my usual seat at his feet, and with some little trepidation, told him what I had done; and ventured to slip the notes which I had that morning received from Mrs. Wilton into his hand. I was, happily, quite prepared for the reception my story had; there was all possible kindness and tenderness in my father's manner of receiving my offering, but there was sadness, too. It pained him a little, just at first, that he should need one of his children to work for him instead of being able to supply all their wants and his own. It was but a momentary feeling, however, and when it had passed, his gratitude for what I had done for him was far greater than my easy service deserved.

During the long talk that followed between us that evening, he revealed to me more of his own dread of the calamity that was possibly coming upon him than he had ever yet permitted any one to know. I began then first to understand what a struggle for submission to the will of God he was living through; how he dreaded, and yet strove to prepare himself for the moment when all hope of escape would fail, and he should have to face the necessity of resigning himself to a life of darkness and inactivity. Every month's experience which forced him to resign one accustomed duty after another, convinced him, he said, that the

dreaded time was drawing near. I could not persuade him to hope such great things as I did from Dr. Allison's skill, but I saw he was thankful for the rest of knowing, that no possible change of averting the threatened evil had been cast away. Most thankful of all to have the wound in his heart healed which Charlie's indifference had caused ; to be spared the temptation of ever thinking or saying in future dark hours, that he might have been saved if his children had loved him enough to divine in time the care he needed. The privilege accorded to me, then, of being allowed to bear a portion of my father's burden, was never withdrawn from me afterwards. I have always looked upon it as one of the most precious gifts of my life.

CHAPTER XV.

" I wept for memory,
She sang for hope that is so fair."

WITH so energetic a person as Mr. Armstrong to share our counsels, there was no fear that we should be long in making arrangements for our respective journeys. He allowed me three days to prepare. On the fourth we all started together, as our road lay in the same direction till we reached the station, ten miles from Broadlands, where I was to leave the train.

On the evening before we left home, my conscience troubled me for not having made my father acquainted with the contents of Lady Helen's last letter. I compromised the matter with myself by throwing out a few hints in the course of a farewell conversation we had, which he might take or not as he pleased. He was extremely slow in taking them, but when at length my meaning dawned upon him, he treated the whole matter so lightly, that I felt entirely excused from taking him further into my confidence.

"Some one in love with Nesta? What a ridiculous idea!" my father cried, rather angrily. "Why she is a mere child! I have not had time to begin her education yet! She must not fancy that she is grown up. What does she say herself, the foolish child?"

"Dear papa, you must not be angry with Nesta. *She* does not say anything about it."

"Then pray take care that no one else does. I shall trust you, Janet. You have some sense. And, remember, I cannot have my little Nesta spoiled. Yes, it is as well you are going to Broadlands. I shall trust to you."

So the subject was dismissed for the time; but I fancy my father had some slight misgiving after his first angry incredulity had passed away.

In talking over the length of his absence with Mr. Armstrong and me, while we were together in the railway-carriage the next day, he seemed anxious to convince himself that it need not be so great as we had at first intended. The proposed six weeks dwindled into three, and at last, when our parting drew near, he said, "Now, remember I trust you, Janet. A fortnight will decide my case. At the end of that time there is no reason why we should not all settle quietly at home again, just as we were. Remember, Janet, don't let me hear of any changes."

I had no time to make a promise which I certainly should not have been able to keep. The train stopped, and the next moment Charlie's and Nesta's faces appeared suddenly at the carriage window.

They had driven over from Broadlands to the station to meet me, and to get a peep at my father on his way to Scotland. It was but a moment's greeting. Mr. Armstrong hurried me from the carriage, and made energetic efforts to secure my luggage. Then came the shrill whistle. He had to jump in again, and in a moment more they were whirled away, their farewells still sounding in my ears—my father's serious "God bless you, my best child!" and Mr. Armstrong's cheerful "Don't be anxious. I'll take care of him, Miss Janet."

We found Lady Helen waiting for us in her carriage outside the station. I think she was really pleased and relieved to see me; for if she had not been in a very good humour, she would hardly have listened so patiently to the home-chatter which Nesta, Charlie, and I kept up incessantly during the long drive home. She even condescended to laugh at our nonsense, and say that it was pleasant to see how we enjoyed being together again.

I learned, during the conversation, that Mr. and Miss

Moorsom were coming that day to remain at Broadlands till the end of the week.

When we reached the house, Nesta was eager to take me into the garden and introduce me at once to some of her favourite haunts; but Lady Helen interposed her authority, insisting that Nesta should go to her room and rest till dinner time. She could not allow Nesta to tire herself, and make herself look pale and wretched *that evening*, she said. She wished her to be her best and brightest, and do herself justice before the guests who were coming to see her. Lady Helen stroked Nesta's cheek and looked admiringly into her face as she said this; but Nesta's countenance fell, and I thought she looked more disturbed than the little disappointment about the garden warranted.

The pleasure of taking me to her room and showing me its odd furniture, restored her to good humour and happy spirits again. But I fancied (it might be only fancy) that Nesta was not quite as unreserved with me, when we were alone together, as it had been her habit to be. She chatted gaily, indeed, but it was to ask eager questions about my own doings, or to point out pretty views of the marshes and the woods, which I might gain from the windows. I could not help feeling all the time that our conversation was not the full confidence on the subjects that interested us most nearly that it used to be. It was almost a relief when the dressing-bell rang, and I had to resign myself into Nesta's hands to be dressed for the evening. As we were leaving our room to go down stairs, a maid came with a message from Lady Helen, to beg me to go to her before dinner.

When I reached Lady Helen's room I found her standing before the glass, putting some finishing touches to a not very careful toilet.

"Ah! my dear, I am glad to see you dressed. I intended to have had a long talk with you, but I positively fell asleep on my sofa, and now we have not a minute. Justine, I must have a cap; my hair is quite rough still—and that lace shawl. There, that will do; go now and see if you can do anything for Miss Ernestine."

When the maid had left the room, Lady Helen turned from the glass to me:

"My dear, I ought to have had some conversation with you before dinner. I am so annoyed with myself for

sleeping. What has little Nesta been talking to you about?"

"I have been talking to her about home, and she has described the walks and the scenery here."

"Now, Janet, don't let us misunderstand each other. I see you are drawing yourself up to withstand what you consider an intrusion into your and Nesta's confidence; but be reasonable. If I do want to know what is passing just now in her mind, can I have any motive but good-will to her, and anxiety that she should secure her own happiness?"

"I think not," I answered, ponderingly.

"You naughty girl; you ought to be sure. However, I will not task your faith in me too severely. You shall judge me by my actions. I will not ask another question; I will only give you a caution. Do not form a hasty judgment of the friends you will meet here to-day, or at least don't express it. A foolish word of ridicule, a disparaging remark, may just upset the balance of judgment in your sister's mind, and lose her such a chance of happiness as she may never have again. Be wise."

"I will be true," I answered, gravely. "I don't believe that Nesta's happiness does depend on a chance word of mine, or can be furthered by any arrangements between us two. Surely there must be some reality in liking; something that cannot be upset by hasty words. I will not talk Nesta into liking or disliking any one. I can only promise to say what I think."

Lady Helen shrugged her shoulders: "Poor Nesta! Well, I have done; I have no longer any responsibility. I have been used to think that experience gives people some right to advise in circumstances where a little misunderstanding might produce a life-long regret. It seems you prefer to act alone, without my guidance. I may now shut my eyes and give myself no further trouble."

"But, Lady Helen, I am not going to act or guide; I am not going to do anything."

"Yes you are; you will act and guide without knowing what you are doing, that is all. Perhaps you are right; some people are not strong enough to influence in any other way. They shut their eyes to their own responsibility, and let themselves be drifted on, till they are sometimes surprised at the aspect of their own doings. I hope that you may be

fortunate, and never have to regret yours. Now we must go down stairs, and I will introduce you to my son and guests. If we do not give poor Mr. Moorsom five minutes to recover the shock of speaking to a fresh person, he won't be able to eat any dinner."

It was a very incomprehensible idea to me that I could be formidable enough to shock any one, however shy; but when Lady Helen had led me across the drawing-room, and I raised my eyes to look at the stranger to whom she presented me, I did not consider the expression too strong. Mr. Moorsom looked very much like a person who had unexpectedly received a shock from an electric battery, and who was trying hard to bear it without shrinking. His arms and legs were rigid, his face glowed like a peony, and his hands were convulsively crushed together; he opened his mouth three several times to speak, panted, and shut it again.

"Let us all sit down," Lady Helen said compassionately, after the third failure. "Ah! here are your sister and Ernestine coming to join us; they have been walking round the garden. Janet, I shall leave Nesta to make you acquainted with her friend; it will be such a pleasure to her."

Lady Helen glided away, and Miss Moorsom came towards me through the open window, holding out her hand, without waiting till Nesta spoke my name. "Oh! I don't stand on stupid ceremonies of that kind," she said. "I know who you are, and you know who I am: that's enough."

She was tall and angular, like her brother. I should have considered her manner disagreeably abrupt, if I had not felt sure that her excited way of speaking and constant nervous laugh were symptoms of the same painful shyness that overpowered her brother.

"You are not at all like your sister," she presently remarked, in a voice that sounded through the room. "Miss Scott is not the least like her sister, is she, Richard? should you have guessed that they were sisters?"

Richard's fingers suffered severely from the appeal; he crushed them till the joints seemed ready to give way; then, not finding that exercise sufficiently painful, he caught convulsively at his left knee, and, passing the clasped hands round it, elevated it to a position that almost concealed his face, and put mine in peril of being touched by the sole of his boot.

I was divided between a strong inclination to laugh, and a feeling of annoyance, which increased while Miss Moorsom persisted in comparing my personal appearance with Nesta's, remarking on the points of contrast with a plainness of speech rather trying to my self-love.

It was a relief to us all when at last Mr. Carr entered, and Lady Helen called upon him immediately to take me into the dining-room.

I had heard so much of Mr. Carr, that I could not help scanning his face curiously when I found myself seated next him at dinner. I had long ago, so long ago as the day when Charlie came back from school and first talked to us about him, made up my mind to dislike Mr. Carr if I ever saw him. For the first half-hour of our acquaintance I had the satisfaction of finding my prejudice justified. He was decidedly very much out of humour that day, and did not take any pains to conceal the fact. He snubbed Miss Moorsom when she persisted in asking him questions, and found fault captiously with almost every remark Mr. Moorsom ventured on making. I decided quite to my own satisfaction that Nesta could not possibly like so disagreeable a person, and that I had been frightening myself with shadows. Before dinner was over, however, he recovered himself so far as to take some pains to draw me into conversation. He spoke of Morfa and Hilary, and against my will I grew interested in listening. More than any one I ever knew, Mr. Carr had the art of making those with whom he took the trouble to converse feel at once at home with him. He seemed to have a mysterious power of divining the subject on which his companion for the moment preferred to talk, and he always managed to convey the impression that this particular subject was a meeting-point which the speaker and himself shared between them. He could talk to people, too, about themselves without seeming impertinent, and speak of his own character without being egotistical. In discussing Hilary's character with me that day, I remember he compared it with his own, with just enough disparagement of himself to make the comparison flattering to my love for Hilary, and with enough self-preference to prevent the disparagement appearing untruthful.

"I am happier than your brother in one thing, and in one only," he remarked. "Opposite as we are, completely oppo-

site, I can do full justice to him. He can never do justice to me, or to any one like me."

"Why not? I am sure Hilary is just to every one," I objected.

He shook his head and laughed; then growing grave immediately, he explained. "Just—yes, he would be just. I suppose it is just to judge without ill-will, according to your own standard—but, do not attempt to deny it—I have measured the height and breadth and depth of your brother's contempt for me. He can never rightly see me through it, I assure you. Luckily, it is no harrier to my understanding and admiring him."

"Are you sure there is no mingling of contempt in your appreciation?" I said.

"Certainly not. I value myself on not knowing such a feeling as contempt. I dare say I lose a great deal by not being able to condemn anything heartily—a great deal of power and thoroughness; but it is the character of my mind, and such a character has certainly some gains. I hold to the gains."

"But do you mean to say that you don't prefer some people to others—that you don't think some people better than others?"

"Not at all. I only mean that I have the candour not to elevate my own likings and dislikings into a standard of right and wrong. I dislike several people enough to wish to keep out of their way. Having established a safe distance between myself and them, I have no desire that they should be other than they are. I can look at them approvingly, and perhaps enjoy their disapproval."

"But stay," I cried, "you can't mean what you are saying. You must disapprove bad people, and wish them to be different from what they are. One must not puzzle one's self about right and wrong, for you know that is not a question of private likings and dislikings; there is a standard out of ourselves."

"Ah! now you are trying to draw me into deep waters; and there is my mother putting up her eye-glass to watch us. There is nothing she enjoys so much as seeing two people engage in a theological discussion, as ours will become, if I follow where your question leads. It gives her the same malicious pleasure that some people take in seeing two old

women run a race in sacks ; she suspects that we shall not get far without stumbling and falling out with each other. We will disappoint her and remain friends. May I venture on making a personal remark ? Till this moment I have been thinking how much you resemble your father, but your manner of insinuating 'you know' into your argument shows me that it is your mother whom you are most like. She was always trying to come round me in the same way."

I had never been told before that I resembled my beautiful mother in the slightest degree. I knew it was not true, yet I could not help being pleased with the remark, and induced to modify my harsh opinion of a person who could say such agreeable things. My appreciation of Mr. Carr's powers of conversation was, perhaps, heightened by contrast, for when we returned to the drawing-room, Lady Helen took up a book, and Nesta and I had to devote ourselves to Miss Moorsom, who seemed to find it as difficult to be silent as other shy people do to speak. Her brother was her chief topic. There was evidently no such hero in the world to her as he ; neither could she be satisfied with praising him herself ; she required full meed of approbation from us, and could not be turned from any one of her narratives till she had had a clear expression of our admiration of his conduct. By the time Mr. Moorsom himself appeared, I had exhausted every form of acquiescence I could think of, and I hailed his joining our party with a feeling of relief : his sister could not surely expect us to flatter him to his face.

He had hardly seated himself beside Nesta, however, before Miss Moorsom was seized with a sudden desire to take a walk with me in the garden. I tried to avoid compliance at first, but when she urged her request a second time, Lady Helen raised her eyes from her book, and gave me a glance which obliged me to submit to my fate, and leave Nesta to hers. It was a lovely evening, and if I had not thought that Nesta looked a little reproachfully at me, as I passed, through the window, I should have enjoyed my stroll up and down the smooth lawn, even with Miss Moorsom's incessant chatter as an accompaniment to the rustle of leaves and the distant sound of the tide rising on the shore. Praise of Nesta now alternated with praise of her brother in Miss Moorsom's discourse. No one could admire Nesta too much to please me, and yet every now and then the words of commendation

jarred. It was as if Miss Moorsom were praising something of her own instead of something of mine, and also as if considerable credit were due to her for discovering virtues and graces which she seemed to presume had never hitherto been appreciated rightly. Nesta might be, as Miss Moorsom called her, "a gem of purest ray serene;" but there was no occasion to insinuate that she would have been hid in "unfathomed caves of ocean," if the Moorsoms had not bestowed upon her the setting of their approbation.

When we re-entered the drawing-room, we found its occupants disposed in different groups from those we had left. Nesta had escaped to the sofa, and was helping Charlie to make out some pencilled notes scribbled on the margins of a volume of Browning's poems; while Lady Helen, having given up her book and reading-chair to her son, occupied Nesta's old seat by the window, and was engaged in confidential talk with Mr. Moorsom. As we entered, Miss Moorsom's sleeve caught in the trellis, and as I stood still to disengage it, I could not help overhearing a sentence of Lady Helen's discourse.

"Such pretty love!" I heard her say. "One must see her with her sister to appreciate what she is. Ah! it is a heart worth winning. This sister is your great rival. She reigns so supreme, that there is hardly room for any one else, I never saw anything so pretty, as her reverence for her sister's supposed wisdom, combined with an almost motherly care of her. Dressing her up at one moment like a doll, and the next listening to her as if she were an oracle. You did not give me credit for so much observation, or for admiring excellence so heartily—now confess you did not?"

To my great relief, Miss Moorsom moved on before her brother spoke; but as I came forward into the light, I could not help being struck with the expression of his face. His great blue eyes were fixed on Lady Helen's with a look of actual reverence in them, while his lips trembled to keep in smiles too happy to have their way.

Our entrance broke up the conference; Lady Helen rose from her seat and walked to the sofa, wondering what Charlie and Nesta had found to interest them so deeply. When, a very few minutes after, Charlie called on Mr. Carr to come and explain the meaning of a note neither he nor Nesta could read clearly, she suddenly remembered that the clock had

struck ten, and that I must be tired with my journey. Charlie and Mr. Carr both remonstrated, but Lady Helen gained her point and carried Nesta and me off up stairs to bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

" We spoke of other things, we coursed about
The subject most at heart ; more near and near,
Like doves about a dove-cote, wheeling round
The central wish until we settled there."

TENNYSON.

My only recollection of the four following days is, that during them our party resembled a set of children playing a game of cross purposes. No two of us ever seemed to be on a right understanding with each other. We made various efforts to arrange pleasant excursions for seeing the country and spending our days out of doors, but when the time for carrying them out arrived, it always transpired that some one of the proposed party, generally either Nesta or Mr. Carr, had been misinformed about the hour, and we were compelled to set out on our walk or drive with diminished numbers and with at least one clouded face. Even when we were sauntering in the garden, or idling in twos and threes in the deep windows of the sitting-rooms, we never seemed to have the power of assorting ourselves into well-arranged groups. The people who were walking or talking with each other always seemed to be watching some one who was talking to some one else. There certainly was a spell upon us : I will not undertake to say what witch's hand laid it. For my own part, I was always vainly endeavouring to relieve Nesta from the *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Moorsom to which she seemed perpetually condemned.

" Why do you let Mr. Moorsom monopolize you so completely ? " I asked, one day when we were alone together, and I ventured to remark on her want of spirit. " You do not seem to enjoy his society much when you are in it. " To my surprise Nesta's eyes filled with tears.

" Why should I not let him talk to me if he likes it ? "

she asked. "No one else does now. How foolish it would be in me to expect the cleverest people to care to talk to me ; it might happen for a little time, but that could only be by chance, you know."

"At all events, it cannot be by chance that the stupidest person in the company is able to bore you exclusively," I said, indignantly. "It must be by Lady Helen's contrivance."

"Why should you think so, Janet ? Lady Helen does not leave me to him more than other people do ; so please don't say any more about it."

I could have said much more if Nesta's "please" had not kept me silent ; I could have said we had a host as well as a hostess, and that I thought Mr. Carr discharged his duties very ill. It was not for want of observation either. Whatever he might be doing—whether he were seated at the reading-table turning over the leaves of a book, or standing in the window, as he sometimes did by the hour, lazily tossing the tassel of the blind backwards and forwards—he always, I was convinced, knew the precise moment when either Nesta or Mr. Moorsom entered the room. His eye always followed them about till Nesta, like a frightened bird, was caught in the snare ; he saw her feeble little efforts to escape, and noted with a kind of satisfaction, I thought, the disappointed look that came over her face when she resigned herself to her lot. Yet he rarely, very rarely, interfered to help her.

On the last day of this tedious week, Charlie and I laid a plot to free Nesta for a few hours from her inevitable companion. It was a lovely morning, and we agreed privately, before breakfast, that we three would escape from the house early and enjoy a long ramble over the marsh and on the beach. We carefully avoided giving a hint of our intention during the breakfast, and succeeded in meeting at the front door without provoking any questions ; over-caution against one peril, however, brought another upon us. While we were waiting on the door-step for what Charlie considered a safe opportunity for stealing across the garden to the shade of the wood, without being spied by either Mr. or Miss Moorsom, Mr. Carr put his head out of his study window, and called Charlie to come to him—

"Were we going down to the shore, the three of us ?—what a fine day for a walk !—would a fourth spoil our

party?" and Mr. Carr was half out of the window, while Charlie's eager assurance that we should be delighted to have his company, brought a vivid colour into Nesta's cheek. Then came a demur, and Mr. Carr retreated into his study again. After all he could not get his hat without being seen by the whole party in the breakfast-room, and bringing them upon us; it was perhaps wiser to let us go alone.

But, no; Charlie felt his honour concerned in baffling Miss Moorsom's sharp eyes. He undertook to bring the hat by the back way, and to cover the retreat of the whole party to the wood if we would leave it all to him.

He slipped away on his errand, and Nesta looked distressfully at me.

"Had we not better go back, and leave Charlie and Mr. Carr to take their walk alone?"

Now I had set my heart on a walk that morning, and I would not understand Nesta's scruples.

"It was ridiculous," I said, "to be turned from our plan so easily. Why should not Mr. Carr walk in his own wood if he liked?"

Before we had finished whispering, Charlie appeared, creeping cautiously round the house with Mr. Carr's white straw hat stuck on the top of his own brown one. His affectation of extreme caution was so ridiculous, that we could not help laughing—laughing, but not winning—we had lingered ten minutes too long. Lady Helen heard our laughter as she was crossing the hall from the breakfast-room, and came forward, smiling, to learn its cause.

"Laughter sounded so pleasant in that dull old house," she said.

We could give but a lame excuse for our merriment, but she was all graciousness.

"No matter what we laughed at, so long as we laughed. The prospect of a walk was enough to put us in spirits. And had we really succeeded in conquering Shafto's laziness so far as to induce him to be one of the party? that was a triumph for us indeed! Were we waiting for Miss Moorsom? No! but she was the person of all others who would enjoy such a walk. It would be unkind to leave her out. Would not Nesta run and tell her to get ready? or, stay, it would not do to make the walking party too large; perhaps, it would be best for dear little Nesta to give up her place to

Miss Moorsom. Mr. Moorsom had promised to bud some roses in the garden ; Lady Helen must, she said, "stay to watch the operation, and she should really be obliged to Nesta if she would keep her company. Not that she would have asked such a thing if she had not felt sure that a walk to the shore and back was quite too much for Nesta !"

The last sentence of this long discourse was addressed to me alone ; before Lady Helen reached it Mr. Carr had retreated into the depths of his study, from which he did not emerge for several hours ; Nesta had gone to seek Miss Moorsom, and Charlie had turned his back upon us, and was hiding a very cloudy face by appearing wholly occupied in restoring shape to the crown of his cap, which had suffered in its contact with Mr. Carr's. In the end, Charlie, Miss Moorsom, and I were the only walkers, and as we did not start till an hour later than we had at first proposed, we had the sunniest part of the morning for our walk, missed the high tide, and came home hot, weary, and cross with each other. The gardening party seemed to have fared better than we ; Lady Helen and Mr. Moorsom declared that they had passed a most enjoyable morning, while Nesta's little pale face wore no other trace of disappointment than a slight shade of added weariness, which Lady Helen could easily attribute to the heat.

After luncheon we all assisted for an hour or so in such of the gardening operations as still remained unfinished ; and when we were tired we adjourned to Nesta's favourite seat, under a large mulberry tree, which stood at the end of the lawn, close to a pond covered with water-lilies. Here we might have spent the rest of the afternoon very pleasantly. Mr. Moorsom was obliged to go into the house to write some letters ; Lady Helen soon followed him ; Miss Moorsom shut her eyes, and leaned her head against a branch of the tree : and just as she dropped into a doze, Mr. Carr, whom we had not seen since the morning, sauntered down the long walk with a book in his hand, and offered to come and read aloud to us.

He soon found a seat on the grass by Nesta's feet, and began to read. He was a very good reader, and his book was a volume of the "Faery Queen." We were just beginning, thanks to his comments, to understand and enjoy the passage he had selected, when we were disturbed by the sound of tripping steps coming down the walk, and Mdle.

Justine's inquisitive face appeared between the overhanging branches.

"*Mille pardons!* She was so sorry to disturb us, but her lady had sent her to look for Miss Ernestine. Her ladyship was desolated that Miss Ernestine should have stayed out so long, and entreated her to go and sit with her in the boudoir, that she might assure herself she was resting."

I had an excuse ready, but Ernestine put her hand over my mouth, and rose to follow Justine, saying merely, as she looked back,

"You and Charlie can hear the rest of the canto quite as well without me."

We did not hear it, however. Mr. Carr held the book in his hand and sat with us for some minutes longer, but we heard nothing but the quick impatient tap of his foot against the gravel, and the snap of little branches of the tree which he kept breaking off and tossing from him. At last he rose and walked back to the house, thrusting the branches of the tree aside with such vehemence as he left the arbour, that Miss Moorsom's head was shaken rudely from its resting-place, and brought into sharp contact with her knee. Soon afterwards Miss Moorsom retreated in-doors, somewhat out of humour at her unceremonious waking, and Charlie and I were left to grumble to each other at the odd arrangements of this house, which, while leaving every person the appearance of perfect freedom, never, in reality, permitted any two to do as they liked for ten minutes without interruption.

So that bright summer day was wasted. The evening brought us some relief. Lady Helen having over-fatigued herself by her ceaseless exertions during the day, was obliged to retire to her room immediately after dinner; and we young people drew round the open drawing-room window with a more sociable feeling than was at all common in the Broadlands atmosphere.

From chatting pleasantly, we somehow or other—I fear it was Charlie's and my doing—drifted into an argument in which we all grew eager.

Miss Moorsom brought out, to show Nesta, a present her brother had lately given her. It was a copy of "*Tupper's Proverbial Philosophy*," and Charlie and I, being in a pugnacious mood, resisted hotly her determination to make us praise her favourite author.

She could not long have stood up against our vehemence if her brother had not come to her help, and defended his choice of a present rather pertinaciously. After a time, I hardly know how, our argument drifted from the question first started. We proceeded to examine the matter instead of the manner of some of our favourite authors, and found ourselves engaged on graver subjects than we had at first intended to speak about.

As the discussion widened and deepened I found myself slipping round to my opponent's side. He had not always the best of the argument ; he was not so brilliant as Charlie, and he did not always see immediately the drift of the remarks which Mr. Carr let fall—remarks which seemed designed to moderate the zeal of the disputants, but which always had the effect of drawing us into deeper and more troubled waters. He was often silenced for a time, but he kept firm hold of his opinions, and defended them with solid sense and right feeling against Charlie's ridicule and Mr. Carr's metaphysics. I could not help thinking that his earnest, reverent temper of mind contrasted very favourably with Charlie's lightness ; and with the weary acquiescence in a supposed impossibility of ever knowing or believing anything thoroughly, which Mr. Carr professed.

I wondered whether Nesta's thoughts were taking the same direction as mine. I noticed that whenever Mr. Carr spoke she raised her head eagerly, and dropped it as he went on. She was always hoping he would say something she could sympathize with, and feeling disappointed when the expected words did not come. Once, when directly appealed to, she gave her verdict in favour of some argument of Mr. Moorsom's, but it was spoken falteringly. How eagerly he bent forward to hear, and how his face brightened up ! I felt that, little as Nesta took part in the discussion, it was her silent presence that gave it all its interest—to two, at least, of the disputants. A sigh of hers ended it at length. Mr. Carr, who had been the last speaker, jumped up hastily.

"We are all tired ; let us go into the garden," he said.

I thought the whole party followed his example, but I was mistaken. Miss Moorsom detained Charlie and her brother to look for some wraps for her ; and so it fell out that Nesta, Mr. Carr, and I found ourselves pacing up and down the moonlit garden together. Nesta took my arm and clung to

me, Mr. Carr walked by my side. For a turn or two we were silent. When Mr. Carr spoke he did not resume the old subject. He began to discuss Mr. Moorsom's character, and the effect his opinions had upon it, as if we three had been in accord. "New and old," he said to himself, musingly, "how wonderfully the two influences have combined to form our friend's character. He is a specimen of the English tendency to cling to old modes of thought and traditional opinions, and yet to allow the spirit of the new to pervade and change them, till only the outward form remains the same. He thinks himself a champion of old opinions, and would perhaps single me out as one of those who are trying to overturn them: he is mistaken. The contrary rather is true. I am one of the standers-still—one of the lingerers and doubters—from whom everything falls. It has been the temper of mind of my family for the last hundred years. See how we have fared in worldly things; we have had no tenacity to hold even those. His family have been gaining, while we have been losing, till at last they have pushed us, who once owned the whole county, to this little strip of marsh-land next the sea. I, for my part, can acknowledge readily that it is time we were made to vanish all together. I cannot be very heartily conservative, when I feel that I myself am a representative of one of the worn-out powers that deserve to be overthrown—reverenced once, but not to be reverenced any longer."

"It is your own fault," I said, eagerly. "If your family has lost influence and honour and prosperity, has it not been because they failed to use them well when they had them? May not the failure have risen from that very want of firm faith in something higher than themselves which you confessed this evening? If they had reverenced rightly, might they not have continued worthy of reverence?"

"Perhaps so," he said; "I do not know. I, at least, have fallen on an evil inheritance. I have seen everything crumbling round me—a fallen family keeping up hollow appearances of prosperity—false pretensions to distinctions and nobleness, which eat away the possibility of true nobleness, because they are false."

"But, surely, with the gifts you have——"

He shook his head. "What have I?—an angry fancy!—nay, I think that has been the worst misfortune to me of

all. It has been like all my other possessions—a name, instead of a reality! Fairy gold, which when it is wanted for use turns to dust!”

“I think it is wrong and ungrateful to speak of any gift in that way,” I said; “you know in your heart you do not wish you were without it. If you never do more than write one poem, which only a few people are the better for, you ought to be thankful for being allowed to do that. It may be the thing God meant you to do.”

“You are right; that is the true and noble way of looking at it, but one wants some one every now and then to say such words.”

We took a turn in silence, and then Nesta spoke in a tremulous voice, Mr. Carr leaning over to catch every word.

“I have wanted to say one thing just now, only you have rather turned the conversation away.”

“Say it, please.”

“I wanted to ask, is it not puzzling yourself to mix so many things together? You talk of old opinions and new, and then of your family having lost everything, Janet says, for want of reverence and faith. But, surely, that last want need not be an inheritance. If we say exactly what we mean, and call it faith in God—belief in all the good news He has revealed to us, does it not seem clear that it is a possession we each must strive after for ourselves, one that you ought not to talk of wanting without the greatest sorrow and fear?”

“I do speak sorrowfully,” he said, “but can one change one's nature? can one alter one's experience? Having been brought up in a loveless, earthly home, can I have faith in heavenly love? Do I know anything about it? One must go step by step—first the lower, then the higher faith. The best things here first; and then from knowledge and experience of these, truths which no logic can establish dawn upon the soul. So, at least, I think it will have to be with me. My education began at the wrong end; but sometimes I see a chance of going back so far, that I may start fair again. Do you remember how Gerda, the Giant Maiden of Jotenheim, learned to believe there was such a place as Asgard?”

“No,” I answered; “I don't know what you mean.”

“Let us sit down on this seat under the window, then, and let me explain my meaning. You know I am a tale-teller by

profession ; since you bid me value my gift, you must let me exercise it."

"One evening, in the days when the city of Asgard still stood on the earth, and when gods and heroes lived in it, it chanced that Frey, the summer-king, climbed Odin's lofty air-throne, and standing on tiptoe there, looked over the earth and the sea, and far away to Giant-land. As he looked, the heavens were flooded with a sudden light, and Frey perceived that the splendour came from the uplifted arms of a beautiful giant-maiden, who was at that moment fastening the door-latch of her father's house among the ice-mountains. Dazzled by the radiance of her fair face and wondrously white arms, Frey fell in love with the giant-maiden, whose name was Gerda, and resolved to send a messenger next day to Giant-land, to entreat her to become his wife, and reign with him over Summer-home, his bright kingdom.

"The silver-tongued Skirnir undertook to carry the invitation. After incredible perils he reached the cold, misty regions where Gerda's giant-father lived, and introduced himself to the presence of the maiden. Then he thought all the difficulties of his enterprise were over. Filled with horror of the frightful scenes he had witnessed, he thought he had only to make known his master's gracious invitation, and the giant-maiden would gladly escape with him from her dark and gloomy dwelling.

"So he spoke, and she listened ; but when he finished speaking, she listened still, smiling always the same amused, incredulous, childish smile. It was to her like the sweet ringing of bells ; she liked to hear, but she had no power to understand. What were Gods of Asgard and Summer-home to her, who had never in all her life seen anything but giants and ice-mountains ? Seeing how little his words were comprehended, Skirnir would have despaired, if an expedient had not presented itself to his mind.

"He carried in his drinking-horn a picture of Frey, which he had drawn up cunningly with some water from a stream in which the summer-king's face was reflected. As a last hope he poured this water into a deep goblet, and handing it to Gerda, bade her look in. She looked, and Frey's face looked back at her ; loving glances came from the pictured eyes ; the parted lips, though motionless, conveyed fond words to her ear. She put down the goblet ; the meaningless smile

had left her face for ever. Skirnir no longer spoke in vain, she was ready to set out with him to Asgard; for she had looked on a face that loved her, and the existence of Summer-home, and of all good and beautiful things, had become plain to her in that moment.'

"There, that is the end of my tale; I wonder whether the Icelandic Skald, who first told it, saw all the meaning in it that I do? Whether he told it to some pious Christian maiden to make her understand his creed—which must always be the creed of a Skald—that love is the only revealer of truth and wisdom, and must always precede faith."

I was the first to speak.

"It is a beautiful story," I said, "but I think that you narrow its meaning, if you suppose that human love only can help us to realize the unseen. I see a great deal more in the story than you do, and so I am sure did your Icelandic Skald."

"And you," Mr. Carr said, turning to Nesta, "if you had been the Norse maiden, to whom the story was told, what should you have said?"

"If the Skald had been a heathen, I should have been too unhappy about him to have listened to stories," Nesta answered. "I should not have let him put love first; I should have told him it was trifling to think of poetry, or stories, or anything, but learning to be a Christian; at least, I hope I should have said so." Here Nesta, who had been looking down, suddenly raised her face, so that the full light of the moon shone upon it; it was pale and troubled, as I had never seen it before.

Mr. Carr started, and sprang up from his seat.

"One would think we had been telling ghost stories instead of fairy tales," he said, "such a fit of seriousness has fallen over us all. That comes of telling tales by moonlight, or perhaps of three such imaginative people as we are, telling tales at all; we forget they are tales, and mistake them for earnest, for Miss Ernestine's most earnest earnest."

"It is time we all went in," I said quickly; "come, Nesta."

But she had already passed through the open window without looking round. Mr. Carr lingered to gather two half-blown roses, and to remark on the superior fragrance of night-blowing flowers. When he wished us good-night at

the drawing-room door, he gave one of the blossoms to me, and offered the other to Nesta, at the same time that he placed a candle he had lighted for us in her hand. Nesta took the candle, but would not see the flower. It was offered again, with an eager, imploring look, and thrown pettishly to the ground when she, with still downcast eyes, repeated her quiet good-night, and moved towards the staircase. I thought she would have acted better if she had taken the flower as a matter of course, as I had done.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Love took up the glass of Time and turned it in his glowing hands,
Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands."

TENNYSON.

THE next morning Mr. and Miss Moorsom returned to Deepdale, and with their departure began our happiest week at Broadlands. Stay, I don't mean to insinuate that our happiness resulted mainly from being relieved of their presence. I am obliged to confess that our golden days owed their brightness to a cause which ought to have had the effect of depressing instead of raising our spirits.

Over-fatigue and anxiety brought on Lady Helen an attack of illness which confined her to her room for several days; and I am sorry to say we were all hard-hearted enough to enjoy extremely the sense of freedom which came upon us when we knew ourselves to be secure from the overlooking of her satirical eyes.

Nesta and I were not remiss in trying to make ourselves useful to the invalid when we were permitted to see her, but that was only for short intervals at a time; and during the many other hours of the bright days, we were at full liberty to make the most of our country holiday. A holiday-spirit seemed to have come over us all. Charlie was as wildly gay as he had ever been in the happiest of our home-holiday times. As for Mr. Carr, I used to wonder what had come to him during that week. He was the gayest, the youngest of us all—the most eager to turn each bright morning and sunny afternoon to the best account for a nutting-ramble, or a

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visit to a distant harvest-field, where the first gleanings of the year were to be gathered ; or for taking advantage of the low tide for a long walk on the shore. The sight of woods in their variegated autumn dress, or of a flat stretch of sand steeped in the golden afternoon light of September sunshine, never fails to bring back to me the recollection of those happy, idle days spent in almost ceaseless talk. We always kept together in our rambles—a compact party of four. There were no *têtes-à-têtes*, no manifest preference of one companion by another. Our arguments, our jokes, our undisguised interest in each other's thoughts and pleasures, we shared, or seemed to share, in common. Perhaps, if it had not been so, some fears of mine, or some scruples of Nesta's, would have arisen to trouble our freedom. As it was, I allowed scruples and fears for the future to rest, and gave myself up to the spirit of enjoyment that had come upon us ;—four young imaginative people, full of each other, with minds awake to every charm of nature, eager to catch up and follow out every picturesque fancy, every suggestion of deeper thought, which originated with one or the other ; and among us that wonderful sense of accord—of vivid interest about trifles—of child-like joy, which sometimes hovers over a whole party when any two of the number are living under the magic influence of a yet unconfessed love. One spoken word and the charm for the bystanders is broken ; but till that word is said, the spell is often potent enough to affect the moral atmosphere of a whole household.

It was not strange, perhaps, that Charlie and I concerned ourselves little with anything but the amusements of the hours as they passed ; but I was much surprised, when I came to think it over afterwards, that Lady Helen's vigilance slept so long—that she could, for six days, have concerned herself so little about what we were doing. She was, it is true, suffering terribly all the time from severe neuralgic pain, attacks of which often prostrated her for weeks together, and she, of all persons I ever knew, was the most afraid of pain, and the most completely conquered by it. I have known her more than once lay aside schemes on which her heart was set, if a threatening of illness warned her that her exertions were bringing upon her the pain she was always dreading. I used to think her cowardly. I did not know then how terrible were the sufferings she had to fear.

I am afraid we were not very sympathizing at that time, but we did not know how wearily our bright days passed with Lady Helen. Our liberty came to an end suddenly, and not too soon perhaps, for I remember that during our last walk from the shore we fell into a conversation which caused me some misgiving and embarrassment. We were late in leaving the beach on that day, and we stood a moment at the gate leading into the wood, to look at the wide stretch of marsh land between us and the sea, from which the last crimson rays of the sun were fading. Mr. Carr had taught us all to admire the colouring of these marshes—the purple in the distance where the sea-mist hung, the vivid green in the foreground broken by patches of chocolate-coloured feathery topped rushes. As we looked, the crimson light which lay like a garment over the level plain went in a moment, and the blue grey mist of twilight came down in its place. Charlie exclaimed on the sudden disappearance of the sunshine; Nesta, in reply, pointed out a bank of clouds still purple, crimson, and gold with sunset light.

"They have got it all to themselves," she said. "How solid they look resting on the sea! What a pity it is we are all so terribly wise; if we were not, I think we should be tempted to get into a boat and sail out to them. I can just remember when I used really to believe that heaven was there."

Mr. Carr looked at her, smiling. "Is that so very long ago?" he said. "Are we so terribly wise? I don't know. I think I am disposed still sometimes to mistake cloudland for heaven; it seems very solid if one looks long enough at it, as we have been doing lately. One grows loth to believe that it would prove very unsubstantial, misty, and cold if one succeeded in getting there."

Nesta looked puzzled, not knowing what to make of the remark, and Mr. Carr turned abruptly from her and entered the wood first. He kept a little before us nearly all the way home; sometimes walking very quickly, sometimes pausing to draw down a branch of a tree and stand for a moment looking at its leaves as if he were absorbed in admiring the delicate tracery of their veins, then tossing the branch impatiently from him and hurrying on again. We lost sight of him at last, but met him again at the gate which opened from the wood into the Broadlands garden.

"Are you in a hurry to go in?" he said, when we had passed through the gate. "It is not late; let us take one turn down the lime-tree walk to the pond; we must have one more nosegay of water-lilies."

Nesta hesitated a moment, and when we did turn towards the pond she walked quickly. Mr. Carr put his hand before her to check her speed.

"No, not so fast," he said. "I have been setting you a bad example, but I have been repenting it during the last ten minutes. Shall I tell you what I was thinking of as I stood at the gate?"

Seeing that Nesta was disposed to remain silent, I answered for her—"Yes, if you please."

"Well, I was wondering over the strange perversity which makes us so often linger over disagreeable things as if we were determined to taste them thoroughly; while we are generally rather in a hurry to live through our happiest hours; and are often foolish enough to throw away or give up a very great pleasure when we suspect that it is offered us for the last time. I have been in one of these perverse moods this evening: because it occurred to me that these pleasant days must come to an end sooner or later, I have spoiled for myself the last hours of this one. It is a great pity that one can't be reasonable, that one can't enjoy things just enough not to make it too bitter to give them up."

"Do you think so?" said Nesta, gently. "Do you think it a pity? I am not sure that I do. I should not choose to be able to give up without being sorry. I think I had rather keep a regret all my life, than let any remembrance I loved die away." This was a long speech for Nesta, and the effort of making it brought a delicate rose flush to her cheek.

I hastened to put in my word. "It is all very well," I said, "to be sentimental over real losses; but I agree with Mr. Carr—one ought to be able to enjoy a pleasant idle holiday with summer friends without spoiling the last days of it by thinking how soon it will be over."

"A pleasant idle holiday with summer friends," Mr. Carr exclaimed, taking up my words. "That is your expression, not mine—your idea of the worth and stability of our liking for each other. Summer friends! holiday friends! Well I have never had any other in my life yet, I suppose I have no right to expect more."

"You have no right to misunderstand my expression so perversely," I answered. "I said 'summer friends,' and I meant, as you know, the friends of a summer. I do not see how we are to stretch out our acquaintanceship to cover a longer time than that."

"Let it be so. I have no wish to stretch it out. I have a great contempt for a valuation of liking which can be measured by time. If a friendship cannot make its own time, one day a thousand years, I want nothing of it. I quarrelled with your word because it had something ominous in its sound to me. I have a sort of superstition about summer; each one has its own individuality to me, and I mourn the death of one as if I were mourning for a friend who will never come again. 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended'—those words have always had an extraordinary pathos for me; every wail of October wind repeats them. When this summer goes down, and takes more, so much more than any other has ever done, how dreary, how long the winter will be, how doubly dark for the past brightness!"

During this speech, Mr. Carr, who had been hitherto walking near me, contrived to bring himself round to Nesta's side. He lowered his voice as if for her hearing only, and seemed to expect an answer from her when he ceased speaking. None came, Nesta paced slowly on with her eyes fixed on the ground, and I made an effort to put an end to a conversation that was beginning to trouble me.

"We are passing the pond," I said; "if you mean to gather any water-lilies you had better stop and get them."

My remark brought my companions to a stand, but that was all. They remained for some minutes silently looking at the water. Nesta spoke first.

"We need not stay, there are no water-lilies in flower. I don't think we shall ever get any more; they are over for the year," she said, sadly.

"Ah! they are summer friends," said Mr. Carr.

"But we must not blame them for that," said Nesta, quickly. "When the sun shone warm upon them, they gave us their best blossoms; when he ceases to shine, what can they do, but slip down and hide themselves in the water?"

"Nay, there is one," I interrupted; "you are not really looking—there, under the willow branch. If you are too lazy to get it, I will."

The lily proved less easy to reach than I had expected, and before we had secured it, Charlie, who had been to the house, returned to look for us. His spirit of enterprise drew us into a prolonged search for water flowers, so that Nesta's hands and mine were laden with gay flags and half-blown lilies, when, talking and laughing a little eagerly over our exploits, we emerged from the shade of the lime-trees on to the lawn in front of the house.

I dare say we looked a very happy party, to an invalid who had been shut out from fresh air and pleasant company for several days. Lady Helen, at least, seemed to have thought it worth while to make an unusual effort to look at us. She had had her sofa wheeled to the window of her boudoir for the first time that day, and when I looked up, on entering the house, I saw that she had raised the blind a little with her hand, and was leaning forward from her couch to command a good view of the lime-tree walk and the garden. It is, perhaps, natural to feel rather saddened than exhilarated by the sight of mirth from which one is excluded, and it may have struck Lady Helen that her son and her guests showed an unsympathizing disposition, to enjoy themselves while she was suffering. There was certainly an expression of pique on her face when Nesta and I came to her room after dinner to sit with her till bed-time. We had hurried from the dinner-table, but with all our haste we were a quarter of an hour later than usual, and Lady Helen did not fail to make us observe this. "It was fortunate for her," she said, "that she should not be obliged to tax the charity of her friends for amusement much longer; no one ought to be ill for more than a week, or at least no one should expect to be nursed and considered longer." Lady Helen said "she perceived that she had now had her week's nursing; on the morrow she meant to come down stairs and be well. Nesta might sing, and I might read aloud to her for one more evening—on the morrow *she* would wait upon *us*."

Poor Nesta listened to these bitter speeches with a face full of remorse, and sang her songs in a tearful voice. I, feeling sure that Lady Helen would not permit herself the excitement of being angry with us, if she were not really stronger and freer from pain, read aloud with my usual emphasis, and enjoyment of the very pleasant book Mr. Carr

had selected for our reading. On previous evenings Lady Helen had made an effort to listen, saying that she found it more easy to compose herself to sleep if her mind had been filled during her last waking hours with any other person's thoughts than her own. That night she was restless and inattentive, and in about half an hour stopped me in the middle of a sentence. "There, that will do, I can't listen to such twaddle, now that I am beginning to feel alive again. Could you be so obliging as to hand me my letters?—they are all on that little table. Thank you! Now Nesta had better go to bed, and you may stay with me while I look them over."

As Nesta left the room Lady Helen looked after her, observed that she was pale, and expressed a hope that I had not allowed her to over-fatigue herself with walking. "How had we been spending our time while she was too ill to think about us?"

I bore the scrutinizing look as unconcernedly as I could, and Lady Helen turned to her letters. It was the accumulation of several days; the greater number she threw back on the table unopened, some she just glanced at; the two she reserved for careful reading seemed to engage her attention pleasantly. Her brow smoothed as she read; and when she came to the last word of the last letter she was so beaming with satisfaction that she was disposed to impart some of it to me. "Good news from Morfa!" she said. "This long letter is from Mr. Lester—good friend that he is! How few people of his age trouble themselves to write such long letters!"

"Is Rosamond better?" I asked. "Mamma did not give a good report of her when she wrote last. What does Mr. Lester say?"

"Let me see" (glancing back at the letter)—"no, he does not give a good report of Rosamond's health. He says she makes very little progress towards recovery, and that the doctors are puzzled. They are disposed to attribute their want of success to some mental cause—to some anxiety or trouble weighing on her mind. Mr. Lester writes this to me frankly. I suppose I ought to call it bad news, but, my dear Janet, I have already given you a peep behind the scenes, so you will understand me. He ends his letter by an invitation to Shafto to return to Morfa. He implies that his coming will be the best remedy for Rosamond's want of spirits and seems

a little surprised that he should have kept away so long. Come, Janet, why are you silent? I expect a little sympathy from you; you are young enough to take an interest in love troubles, and ought to rejoice in the prospect of a happy ending to our Morfa romance."

I had seated myself on a footstool by Lady Helen's couch while she read her letters. During her last speech I betook myself to platting and unplatting the fringe of her cushion, affecting to be too intent on making the ends of my plats correspond to have attention to spare for anything else. Lady Helen at last leaned down from her sofa, put her long finger under my chin, and said, half-playfully, half-imperiously, "Look up, Janet! I will know what you are thinking of!—you shall answer me!"

"Well, then, if you will have it, I am thinking that when I write a romance, I will not permit my heroine to be depressed in spirits on account of the absence of a lover, who meanwhile can enjoy pleasant society and fine weather very thoroughly, though she is ill. If any one is to be in despair in my romance, it shall be the gentleman, not the lady."

"Then, let me tell you, your romance will not be true to nature. Silly child! do you really think that love is ever as much to men as it is to women? Do you expect to find a lover who will eat or drink less, or refuse to be amused in consequence of anything you may be suffering? You have still to learn that 'men must work and women must weep.'"

"No; I am quite willing that men should work, but I think there should be *some* proportion in feeling. I do not envy Rosamond Lester."

"That is fortunate, for no envy could give you her fate. I do not consider her attachment to Shafto disproportionate, and certainly not the least unaccountable, though, as you know, I am not so fond a mother as to be blind to my son's deficiencies."

"And you are sure that his deficiencies do not include a want of love for the bride you have chosen for him?" I asked, platting away diligently at my fringe as I spoke.

"What makes you think so?" asked Lady Helen, sharply; "but stay, you need not answer. I can answer myself. Shafto's manner has misled you. You don't understand him. Take care that you do not come to false conclusions about his feelings and intentions. He may not be what you would call

in love with Rosamond Lester, but he likes her well enough, and he is quite alive to the advantages of marrying her. He will make an excellent husband for her—now mind, I say *for her*, not for any one else. He will make a good husband to a girl like Rosamond, who, having all the externals of a smooth easy life secured to her, will never make embarrassing claims upon him; but Janet, I should pity his wife if she were called on to share a life of poverty and struggle with him. She would find him a broken reed to lean upon. Shafto may say what he likes about himself, but he is not capable of bearing up against petty cares. If he were to marry a poor woman, I should indeed pity his wife."

Once more Lady Helen bent down, and lifted up my face with her finger. This time I looked boldly up, and said, emphatically, "So should I."

"We are agreed then, and I am glad of it. There, help me to lie down again. Why have I excited myself so? How quickly my pulse beats! Let us choose another topic, and don't say anything to agitate me. The letter I first read concerns you more than me. I want to speak to you about it. It is from Mr. Moorsom."

"Indeed!" I said, drily.

"You have no curiosity to hear what he writes to me? You do not think it concerns you or Nesta?"

"I hope not. I should be sorry if I thought it did."

"Well, don't look so solemn; there is no occasion to be so very dignified about it. Charming as Nesta is, she will find that admirers who have so much to recommend them as Mr. Moorsom are easily discouraged; and above all things we must not be premature. There is nothing formidable in my letter after all. Since you have no curiosity about its contents, you shall only hear Lady Moorsom's postscript. She invites us to pay her a three days' visit at Deepdale, and begs that if I am not well enough to leave home, I will permit you and Nesta to go alone."

"If you are not well enough, and if we have a choice," I began—

"I do not think I can give you a choice. I must not let you make yourselves ridiculous, and since there is no good reason why you should not stay three days at Deepdale, it would be ridiculous to refuse to go. It would look conscious, which you have no business to be. Nesta is not. I dare say

you will have a very uneventful visit ; and I can promise you that Mr. Moorsom will not break his heart when you come away. People don't break their hearts so easily."

"But we had rather not go to Deepdale," I persisted.

"My dear, I am sorry to thwart you, but I cannot help it. Lady Moorsom will be offended if you do not go, and besides, to tell you the truth, three days' complete rest will be a boon to me ; and Shafto, seeing me disembarrassed of my guests, will feel at liberty to set off at once to Morfa, as he ought to do. Now I will send for Shafto, for I shall not rest to-night till I have talked over Mr. Lester's letter with him. But oh ! what am I doing ?—the pain again ! It shot like a dagger through my head. I must not attempt to see Shafto. Take all the letters away—quite out of my sight—and read to me, Janet : anything to keep me from thinking."

I don't know whether the reading had the desired effect on Lady Helen. It certainly did not keep me from thinking. I read on mechanically till long past midnight. Misgivings, which I had thrust aside during the past week, came back with double force upon me now, and would be looked at. I felt that we were unwelcome guests in Lady Helen's house, and hated the thought of remaining so ; yet when I turned over in my mind various schemes for escaping, I could not fix on any one that satisfied me. I had had several letters from my father since he arrived in Edinburgh. In all he spoke hopefully of the good he expected to derive from Dr. Allison's advice, if only he could remain long enough under his care to give his remedies a fair trial. I could not bear the thought of cutting short his holiday, or spoiling it by writing to him about our difficulties ; the least hint of them would, I knew, bring him home at once. Neither did my mother's or Hilary's letters hold out any hope of a speedy family reunion. Rosamond Lester still continued in a precarious state of health, and my mother, influenced, I could see, by Hilary, and over-awed by Mr. Lester, appeared to consider it impossible that she should be permitted to leave Morfa till Rosamond believed herself well enough to do without her. I feared Hilary would never forgive me if I urged her to return home ; and I was myself very reluctant to do so till I was absolutely obliged. Lady Helen fell asleep before I had come to any determination ; and I crept softly to my room, glad, at all events, not to be obliged to trouble Nesta with my perplexities that night.

I rose early the next morning, and contrived to have some private talk with Charlie before breakfast, but I could not get him to see my difficulty in a serious light. "Lady Helen had always been very kind to him," he said; "he had never heard a word that could lead him to suppose she was tired of our company. Why should she be? It must be a fancy of mine, and Charlie wished heartily that I would not have such uncomfortable fancies. It would be a dreadful bore to go back to London; and for his part he would never forgive me if I did anything to cut short the pleasantest visit he had ever had in his life. If I must invent romances, he wished I would not mix Nesta and him up in them." My own suspicions were not altered by Charlie's incredulity, but I felt afraid of acting on an opinion which no one shared, and determined to let events take their course, rather than bring on myself the responsibility of interfering.

Lady Helen did not appear at breakfast, but she sent me a note to say that she had arranged to send us over to Deepdale in the afternoon of the next day. To escape the necessity of accompanying us, Charlie announced an intention of paying a three days' visit to the house of his college friend with whom he had stayed before Nesta came to Norfolk. He recollected suddenly that he owed this friend some attention, and proposed to spend the morning in riding over to call upon him.

We saw nothing of either Lady Helen or Mr. Carr during the morning. Mr. Carr breakfasted with his mother in her boudoir, and remained in close conference with her for two hours. We afterwards saw him pacing, hatless, up and down the garden, in an apparently very restless mood of mind. Being myself indisposed for any useful occupation that morning, I could not help watching him as he wandered to and fro on the lawn, snatching at the drooping branches of the lime-trees as he passed under them, and tossing away the leaves spoilt and crumpled in his hand. Sometimes he walked up and down the gravelled path beneath the window of the drawing-room, where Nesta and I were sitting. More than once he passed the open window slowly, paused, made a movement as if he were going to enter, and then walked away again.

It was certainly nothing to us that he should give himself so much unnecessary exercise in the hot sun, yet I could not

but perceive that his restlessness affected Nesta. She started whenever the sound of his footsteps were heard on the gravel walk, and changed her occupation so often, that I was driven at last to ask what ailed her.

Perhaps she only shared the mood that pervaded the whole household. Every one was restless on that day, as if to make up for the pleasant tranquillity of the last week. The sound of Lady Helen's bell, pulled hastily, came from the upper regions every ten minutes. Justine must have spent her morning on the stairs, for every time I looked from the drawing-room door, which was rather frequently, I saw her smart figure ascending or descending, or encountered her peering eyes as she paused on the landing to take a general survey of the house. Was it part of her business, I wondered, to acquaint her mistress with the use we were making of our time that idle morning?

At luncheon, Lady Helen joined us, beautifully dressed, smiling, and bland—a little more pale and worn than when she had sat at the head of the table a week before, but keeping no trace of the irritability of the previous evening. "I was her clever Janet, and Nesta her sweet one—her pretty one; and Charlie must tell her the news, and join her in scolding Shafto for bringing a moody face to greet her reappearance among us."

She was gracious to everybody, but her manner to her son was almost beseeching. She laid little traps to draw him into conversation with her. She tried to catch his eye, and once, when she had found a pretext for moving down to his end of the room, she placed her hand caressingly on his shoulder. It was the only time I ever saw the least outward show of affection from her to him.

He tried hard to sustain himself in silence and ill-humour. I think he had entered the dining-room determined to say as little as possible, but Lady Helen's unwonted gentleness surprised him into amiability before the luncheon-hour was over.

We drove out in the afternoon, and when we returned it was time to dress for dinner. We had a hasty dressing, for we heard Lady Helen go down stairs before we had been a quarter of an hour in our room. I hastened after her, leaving Nesta—who that day seemed to have lost all her usual deftness, and to find insuperable difficulties in the arrangement of her hair and the tying of her sash—to descend alone.

It cost Lady Helen a great effort to sit up during the dinner-hour. Why did she make it? I was learning now to know her face, and to read its expression through the mask of gaiety and good-humour she would at times assume. I noticed the flush of pain burning on her wasted cheeks—the frequent sudden inward pressure of her lips—the contraction of her brows; and I pitied her enough to second her to the best of my power. I did what I could to keep the conversation general, and to avoid the sudden pauses, or the possibility of *tête-à-têtes*, which I saw she dreaded. No allusion was made all the evening to the approaching break-up of our party. Once or twice I observed, with surprise, that Lady Helen, in speaking to her son of plans for future days, seemed to take it for granted that we should soon all be together again. She appeared to forget, or to wish us to forget, that Mr. Carr would have left Broadlands for Morfa before we returned from Deepdale. At last the clock struck ten, and Lady Helen, insisting that she had never seen any one look so sleepy as Nesta did, marshalled us all up stairs. At the head of the stairs she dismissed Nesta, with a kiss on what she called her sleepy eyes, but requested me to follow her to her room and read her to sleep, as I had done on the previous evening.

I was shocked to see the change that came over Lady Helen when she found herself at last alone with me. She put her lamp down on the nearest table, and sank down on her couch with a half-suppressed groan of weariness and pain.

"Oh, Janet! Janet! I have been doing too much! I am killing myself and for nothing! Oh, if I should make myself very ill, and gain nothing by all my struggles! It is terrible to have such strong wishes, and a feverish imagination like mine, always active to suggest every possibility of failure—to make me taste beforehand the bitter cup of disappointment! Oh, to be a stock or a stone, to blunt one's feeling till one could be satisfied to wear life away in getting up, and going to bed, and eating and feeling the sunshine as animals do!"

I suppose I looked shocked, for Lady Helen put up her hand to stop a reply I was beginning.

"Don't answer! A sympathizing face is all you can give me—I don't want advice."

"But, oh, Lady Helen," I cried, "don't you know any state between violent wishes and utter indifference? Would it be impossible to you to be resigned if you were disappointed in this wish you speak of? There is surely such a thing as being resigned!"

"Is there?—people say so—people who have never wished, or who have never been disappointed. But, Janet, I have set my heart for years on attaining one end. I had a wish in my youth—I was disappointed, but never resigned; it has always stood before me as one desirable object to attain. The possibility of gaining something like my old wish has dawned upon me in middle life—can you wonder if I try hard for it, and refuse to have it again snatched from me? I have brought you here to-night, and I am opening my heart to you, because I know that you are on my side, and it is well that you should see the difficulties that would lie in the way of any one who tried to oppose me. We understand each other, don't we, Janet?"

"I think I understand you. But I should be easier if you would say openly all that is in your mind."

"You are mistaken. We should both of us be much less easy—you understand me, that is enough. And I should not have said all this to you, if I had not known that our interests are the same—that I am serving your cause as well as my own."

"Then I don't understand you. I am not interested in any cause. My only wish just now is that Nesta and I were safe home again, and that we had done with mysteries."

"You are a wise child, and I am much obliged to you."

Lady Helen lay still, with her eyes shut, for some time, while I read aloud to her. Seeing her more tranquil, at length, I rose to go. As I wished her good night, I asked, "When does Mr. Carr go to Morfa? If he is likely to see mamma and Hilary soon, I should like him to give them news of us. They will think it strange if we do not send any message."

Lady Helen half started from her couch, and put her hand on my arm. "Janet, you were sincere in what you said just now? Yes, I see you are! Then be guided by me—don't ask any questions. Trust your message to your mother to me, and don't waste time to-morrow in useless farewells. There is no use in troubling Shafto to-morrow with messages

that he is sure to forget, and good-byes that *may* have to be repeated."

"As you please," I answered, coldly. "We are your guests, and you may be sure that we have nothing to say to any one in your house that you would wish unsaid."

"You are a wise child, Janet, a prudent elder sister. You can't think how much I admire your right feeling and straightforwardness."

"Good night!" I said shortly, for I was in no mood to listen, even to praise from Lady Helen. I felt like a conspirator when Nesta, starting up from a pretended sleep, on my entrance into our room, threw her arms round my neck, and began to question me in frightened, shy whispers.

"Were we really going to-morrow? Had it not been a strange, long, weary day? Had I felt as she had done—as if something had come among us to make us all less happy than we were before? Had I noticed how unhappy Mr. Carr had looked all day, and how he had avoided speaking to us? Could it be that he had heard bad news, or could it be—Nesta did not think it could, and hoped I would not *think* she thought so—but could it possibly be that he was angry with us for going to the Moorsoms? It would be dreadful to make him angry! Would I mind telling her what I thought?"

She laid her soft cheek to mine, and in the darkness I felt that it was wet with tears.

I had been wishing all day that Nesta would open her heart to me, but now that the moment had come, I dare not look in. I was too much afraid of seeing there what I did not wish to see—too anxious not to call out feelings, which my instinct told me would never waken into conscious life till they were put into words. I felt obliged to put back her confidence gently. It was true, I said, as indifferently as I could, that we were going to Deepdale the next day, but I did not think we had any reason to suppose that our going or staying was of sufficient consequence to Mr. Carr to make him angry about it. We had had an uncomfortable day, I admitted, but I hoped we should not have many more such; in a week or two we should go home again. We should have nothing further to do with the people here, and the time we had spent at Broadlands would look like a dream.

"Would it really?" Nesta asked. "Did I really think

we could go back to our home-life, and find it just the same? It looked so far back! Yes," she said, "it would be delightful to be with papa and mamma again. And yet—she hoped it was not very wicked—but the thought did not make her as happy as it ought. When she tried to fancy our all going home, and being just as we used to be, it made her heart sick. Was I shocked or angry?"

A little shocked, I am afraid I was, a little overfull of wonder and remonstrance. Nesta listened meekly to all I had to say, but her arms loosened their clasp of my neck, and her "good-night" kiss was not given with the happy consciousness of perfect sympathy with each other, that used to send us to sleep so peacefully in those old times of a month ago, which to me even began to look far back!

CHAPTER XVIII.

*„Ich dachte an ihn!—Es ist doch das Denken
Ein gar zu köstliches, süßes Gefühl!
Sich ganz in der schönen Erinnerung versenken,
Was geht wohl über dies heitere Spiel?“*

KORNER.

NESTA and I spent the next morning in strolling about the garden and the wood. We might go where we liked without fear of disturbing any one, for Charlie and Mr. Carr had started early on a ride to the railway station to inquire about a parcel of books which Lady Helen wanted. A few lines left by Charlie on the hall table informed me of this fact. Squeezed into a corner of the paper was a postscript in a different hand—"Don't make any plans for the afternoon till we return." I overlooked the words on first glancing through the note. It was a sudden flush which came over Nesta's face when I handed the paper to her that made me examine it again.

"We shall not be allowed to make plans now that Lady Helen is well enough to plan for us," I said, in reply to an anxious look Nesta turned on me; "we shall have no choice left us, you will find." I was right; for in the course of the morning Lady Helen came into our room shawled and bon-

neted. "She was very sorry," she said, "to seem to hurry us away, but if we could be ready she thought she would order the carriage to come round at once—while the day was fine she thought a drive would do her good—an hour or two later she might not be able to enjoy it."

Of course we could make no objection. We were ready when the carriage came to the door, and received warm thanks and praises from Lady Helen for our speed and punctuality.

So it fell out that our good-bye to Mr. Carr was waved from the carriage as he and Charlie passed us on the Deepdale road, at such a fast gallop that they could not stop their horses till we were out of hearing.

If an overpoweringly glad welcome can make up for a cold farewell, there was warmth enough in our reception at Deepdale to put the coldness of Broadlands out of our minds. I confess it had a very soothing effect upon me. When Lady Helen had taken her departure, and we found ourselves surrounded with honest faces, beaming heartfelt satisfaction upon us, I felt more at ease than I had ever done since I left home. I wondered how Nesta, who must know that all this sunshine of kindness shone on her account, could keep her downcast looks unaltered.

There was nothing in all that passed that could embarrass her. She, indeed, received the warmest welcome, as being the first friend, but I was not without my share of distinction; and having every disposition to enjoy being made much of, I permitted myself to be pleased with a good grace.

Before dinner was over, by which time our host had entirely won my heart by asking if I were related to a clever young Mr. Scott, whom he had met at an agricultural meeting in the west country, I felt quite at home with every one, and, perhaps, permitted my new friends to perceive my satisfaction too plainly. What conduced chiefly to set me at ease was, that the one member of the family whose attention would have troubled us, was considerate enough to keep in the back-ground. Lady Moorsom pitied Nesta, and prescribed globules for a headache which she pleaded in excuse for her silence and want of appetite; Miss Moorsom chattered to her, and praised everything about her, from the manner in which she plaited her hair to the open-worked hem of her handkerchief; Sir John explained to me the map of his estate, and

repeated, word for word, a conversation he had had with Hilary on the relative merits of deep and shallow draining. Mr. Moorsom, meanwhile, ensconced himself in a dark corner of the room, with a very antiquated agricultural journal, and though his eyes certainly took long holiday-excursions from his book, he never did anything to remind us of his presence, except when his father directly called on him for information, or Miss Moorsom insisted on his leaving his retreat to be enchanted with Nesta's singing, or wretched on account of her headache. When questioned by his father he answered as sensibly as Hilary himself might have done; and when his sister's appeals forced him to render Nesta some service, his hesitating manner seemed, I thought, to appeal to her good-nature to exonerate him from the charge of having any share in his sister's manœuvres.

Lady Helen would have been enchanted with me if she had overheard my part in an argument into which Nesta and I fell when we were alone in our room that night. We talked long and eagerly, but it was very unlike one of our old home talks. In the middle of it I discovered that, for the first time in our lives, we were talking *at* each other; busying ourselves angrily with a question, which we only cared for because it represented a hidden feeling each saw in the other's heart, and dare not attack openly.

The ostensible subject of our quarrel was the comparative attractions of Broadlands and Deepdale. I praised our new abode, Nesta defended the one we had left; we grew quite hot and angry in support of our opinions, and said sharp things to each other; till at last, as Nesta was expressing her contempt for my preference of Lady Moorsom's trim garden to the untidy lawn at Broadlands, she broke down into an agony of tears—an agony which all my caresses could not for a long time soothe away. It was ridiculous, she acknowledged between her sobs, to cry because I did not agree with her in admiring a garden—too ridiculous—she did not understand what made her feel so—and yet—

Each time she reached the *yet* her tears broke out afresh, and, at last, seeing that I should never hear the end of the sentence, I persuaded her to leave off attempting to finish it, and allow me to help her to bed.

Daylight found Nesta terribly ashamed of her last night's fit of weeping, and very penitent for having caused me so

much anxiety by her unaccountable sorrow. And as penitence with her always included a desire to atone for her offence, she really tried to set my mind at ease on her account, by struggling to overcome her fit of low spirits.

She met the anxious inquiries about her health, that assailed her on every side when she appeared at breakfast, with ready smiles, and cheerful assurances of being quite well, not the least tired, able to walk or ride, or do anything that anybody liked.

Lady Moorsom was made happy all breakfast time by having to tell each person who entered the room, that "she had discovered the right medicine for Miss Ernestine's headache, on the first trial. Such a very bad headache as it had been; so oppressed as dear Miss Ernestine had been with it, and it had yielded to a single globule! It was gratifying to have such a patient."

Mr. Moorsom was duly grateful to the globule, that had worked such wonders, but he could not refrain from putting in a word in favour of Deepdale air; he had never thought Broadlands a healthy place, and he could not help being glad that we had left it.

"How could Broadlands be healthy?" Sir John struck in—"lying, as it did, close to those undrained marsh lands! He had talked to Mr. Carr about draining those marsh lands," Sir John assured us, "till he was tired of talking; they were a disgrace to the whole country, and a perpetual eye-sore to him, who could never ride past them without thinking what they might be made, if they had been possessed by a landlord able and willing to lay out a few thousands judiciously in deep draining, the deeper the better, and more remunerative in the end, as your brother knows, and will tell you if you ask him, Miss Scott."

Sir John had now fairly mounted his hobby, and Lady Moorsom, seeing no present prospect of again bringing forward hers, hastened the conclusion of breakfast. When it was over, she carried Nesta away with her to make a tour of the house, and Sir John and Mr. Moorsom claimed my company in a walk to the home farm. I had on the previous night displayed considerable knowledge on agricultural matters, drawn from my careful perusal of Hilary's letters, and Sir John was, he said, curious to see whether it would stand the test of an open-air examination.

"Many people could talk learnedly in a room," he informed me, as we set out together, "who proved themselves perfect ignoramuses when they were taken into the fields or to the farm-yard."

"If I had been a young farmer wanting some of his land, instead of a young lady making myself very agreeable, he should have said I had too much of what he called book-knowledge. It was easy enough to have that; why, there was young Carr—I should hardly believe it, but he (Sir John) had heard him talk at county meetings, of science, and chemistry, and what not, till really one would think he was the most experienced agriculturist in the district. He talked, but when it came to doing—to draining his own waste lands, for example—(here Sir John stuck his walking-stick deep into the soil of a ploughed field we were crossing)—as for doing, he should just as soon expect to see that stick jump out of the hole, and walk to the gate, as Shafto Carr put any one of his theories into practice. Now (picking up his walking-stick, and resuming his walk), now, I knew what he thought of Shafto Carr. Perhaps, however, I did not care to know.—Here we were at his great turnip field, and I should be put to my first test.—Come, now, were those common turnips or swedes?"

Having never critically examined a turnip in my life, I pronounced wrongly, and gave Sir John the pleasure of a hearty laugh at my ignorance, and a good story against book-learned people to treasure up for future telling.

Mr. Moorsom insisted on my having another chance of redeeming my character, so we passed into other fields, and looked at fences, and pulled down the horns of self-satisfied cows, and I was subjected to other tests, from some of which I came off triumphant, and in others was put to signal shame.

At last Sir John remembered that I might be tired, and as his son had business at a distant farm-house, we separated from him, and turned homewards, Sir John accommodating me by leaving the fields, and taking the straight road. As there was less to see here, we fell into more continuous talk, and I was rather dismayed to find, as we trudged on together, how very confidential it grew, and how difficult it became to avoid understanding Sir John's hints.

"How old, now, did I suppose he was? Sixty-five, did I say?—no, no—no such thing! wrong by eight years. He

should never see seventy again. There was no denying it, and he never tried to hide it from himself; he was getting into years. He should not stump about his fields many more autumns as he was doing that day, but what of that? he had only one wish unfulfilled, and that was to see his son happily married and settled before he died. At the same time, he did not wish him to marry any one. He should like to see him well suited, and heartily in love, and then, if the lady was of a family he could approve, he should ask no further questions. It had never been the custom of the Moorsoms to marry for money. And by the way—talking of family—he did not think he had ever heard it clearly explained to him of whom ours consisted. Had I any brothers besides Hilary and Charlie?"

"No."

"That was as well, perhaps. And our father was a clergyman, *Professor* Scott, a monstrously learned man, no doubt." Sir John assured me that "he had a great respect for the Church; if he had had a second son, and he had been clever—which, however, he would not have been—he had intended to have educated him to take orders. The living of Deepdale was in his gift, and there was no one in the family to take it. They used to say (joking, I understood), that his daughter Susan must marry a clergyman, to keep the living in the family; it did not seem likely to fall out so; perhaps something else was fated—one never knew."

Thus, sometimes soliloquising to himself, sometimes questioning me, Sir John chatted on, till we reached the gate, opening into the flower garden. There, having business in the stable-yard, he left me, saying I should find Lady Moorsom in the garden, by this time busy among her rose-trees.

I congratulated myself on my escape, but I found before long that I had only changed one over-communicative companion for another. Fate seemed to have delivered me over for that day, a victim to private conferences. As I was trying to slip into the house by the drawing-room window, Lady Moorsom, looking a very strange figure, in her brown-holland garden dress and enormous hat, called to me to come and join her on the lawn. There she kept me till the bell rang for luncheon, while, marking time with her garden scissors, she delivered a discourse, which sounded to me terribly like an intimation of her willingness to set herself

vigorously to the task of fitting Nesta for the high responsibility to which Providence had been pleased most inscrutably to call her.

My cheeks grew very hot as the talk went on, but there was no point at which look or hint of mine could stop it. Indeed, it did not take long to see that Lady Moorsom was not the person to be lightly arrested in a discourse. She gave me to understand that she had been highly gratified by the insight into Nesta's character which she had obtained that morning ; Nesta had shown herself thoroughly teachable, and that was the quality which Lady Moorsom most admired in a young girl.

She was disposed to believe, from what she had seen of us, that our mother must be a person whose ideas and principles remarkably corresponded with her own. That would be a gratifying circumstance to them both, when they came to see more of each other, by-and-by.

Nesta looked delicate, and delicate health was a drawback to any one, but Lady Moorsom hastened to assure me that she was not uneasy. When we went home, which must not be till Nesta looked a great deal stronger than she did at present, Lady Moorsom was resolved to write to our mother full directions how to manage Nesta's health. Country air and homœopathic treatment were all that were needed to make her quite robust, and they *must* be secured to her as soon as possible.

I don't think my temper would have borne another sentence of such complete monopoly of care for Nesta. I was only saved from an outbreak by the opportune ringing of a bell, which summoned us to the house.

We spent the afternoon in the garden, watching Mr. and Miss Moorsom as they practised shooting at the target, in readiness for an annual archery fête which was to be held on Sir John's lawn. They were both excellent shots, and the interest they took in each other's successes, and the intense pride with which Sir John watched the performances of both, made the exhibition less wearisome to me than it would otherwise have been. After much entreaty, Nesta and I were prevailed upon to try our powers. I, of course, did nothing but hurt my fingers, and send my arrows right and left among the flower-beds ; but Nesta, after some failures, succeeded once, when her bow had been very carefully

adjusted by Mr. Moorsom, in sending an arrow into the outer circle of the target. The triumph of the whole Moorsom family at this feat could hardly have been greater if the safety of the kingdom had depended on its performance.

I happened to be the last of the ladies to leave the lawn, and just as I was going, Mr. Moorsom, seized with the mania for confiding in me which had embittered my day, called me back, to tell me, in a hesitating voice, that "he *could not* tell me how much he had enjoyed the afternoon, or what a delight it was to him to see us in his father's house. He had hardly dared to hope for such happiness," &c. &c. till my perseveringly quick walking brought us breathless to the door. The evening passed without more *tête-à-têtes*, and I was not sorry, on going to bed, to reflect that one day of our Deepdale visit was over.

The next morning, in the course of conversation at breakfast, it came out that, long as we had been at Broadlands, neither Nesta nor I had visited the favourite resort of sight-seers in the neighbourhood, the ruined abbey and wishing-well at Walsingham. Miss Moorsom's indignation at Lady Helen's gross neglect in not having secured us such a pleasure was only silenced by the vehemence with which Sir John promised us, that we should not leave *his* house till he had shown us everything worth seeing within twenty miles. Mr. Moorsom applauded this resolution very warmly, and suggested that in order not to lose time in carrying it out, we had better drive to Walsingham that morning. The plan pleased every one. We set off about eleven o'clock, Sir John, Miss Moorsom, Nesta, and I, in the open carriage, Mr. Moorsom riding on horseback by the side. It was a glorious September morning, fresh and bright. My spirits rose, and I determined to forget yesterday's perplexities, and give myself up to the enjoyment of the drive. Nesta was very quiet, but I think she felt the influence of the bright day as well as myself. The expression of weariness left her brow, and her lips once more relaxed into the happy dreamy smile I had so often seen them wear during our last week at Broadlands. Her thoughts might be far away from us. I suspected that they were, but no one asked for her thoughts; to sit silent and look pleased was all that was required of her. Mr. Moorsom every now and then rode up to her side of the carriage to bring her a bunch of nuts, or a curious fern-leaf

out of the hedge, or to tell her who lived in the house on the hill, or how long such a village church had been built. She always had a word of thanks and a smile to give him in return for his information ; she allowed her hands to be filled with his gifts, and he was perfectly satisfied—provokingly satisfied, I thought. His honest red face was one glow of delight all day long, while Sir John's head must have been tired of nodding knowingly at his daughter. There was happily so much for me to see, that I could avoid encountering looks of intelligence. My head was generally out of the carriage, now looking backwards at a man and two girls dibbling wheat in a ploughed field, now straining forwards to watch the flight of a covey of partridges Mr. Moorsom had started in trying to hook down a crimson bit of bryony from a hedge. My curiosity about the common country labours I saw going on around afforded continual amusement to Sir John, and caused him to thank his stars very heartily that he had not wasted any of his years in London. How he pitied me for never having seen turnips hoed in my life before, and for not knowing how beets were stored in a field for winter use. I, on my side, reflected on the difference between his and his son's way of looking at country sights, and Mr. Carr's. All three were sincere lovers of the same scenes—all felt their beauty more or less keenly—all were minute observers ; and yet in what a different spirit they looked—what different thoughts the same objects suggested. To one the earth was a curious hieroglyphic book, of which every letter deserved minute study for the chance of its yielding a key to the hidden meaning of the whole ; to the other two it was a vast storehouse, and they the guardians of a portion of its riches, responsible that no particle entrusted to them should be wasted.

We left the carriage at the little inn at Walsingham, and walked to the beautiful grounds where the two or three ivy-covered walls of the old abbey stand. I was a little disappointed to find only one perfect arch of the chapel-window remaining, and that I could not even trace the outline of the other parts of the building.

Sir John did not understand why we cared to know where monks who had been dead for more than three hundred years ate, and said their prayers. He could not but think that the smooth green lawn, where some of Sir Henry Walsingham's fine southdowns were feeding, was a pleasanter sight than old

stones and tumble-down walls. Mr. Moorsom was sorely discomforted that he had not answers ready to all Nesta's questions, and Miss Moorsom appeared to feel aggrieved that I, who had never been to Walsingham before, should presume to know more about the foundation and destruction of its abbey than she did. It was so very odd, she thought, especially as they had a "History of Norfolk" in the library, and she perfectly remembered having often sat upon it when she was a child.

Happily, the business of unpacking the baskets and spreading their contents on the grass engaged our undivided attention before long, and interrupted a dispute between us respecting the credibility of Henry VIII.'s pilgrimage to Walsingham, which Miss Moorson was sure could not have happened without her having heard of it.

By the time we had dined, Sir John was tired and quite ready to start on our road home again. While we visited the well, he would, he said, stroll slowly down to the village and order the servants to put the horses to, he hoped we would not be very long in following him.

The Wishing Well was at some distance from the abbey ruins, and when we reached it, at first sight it looked so much like any other well, that we hardly thought it worth the trouble of coming so far to see. It was not till I was shown a moss-covered stone marked with a cross and showing plainly the spot where bended knees had worn its surface, that I could feel at all solemn. Then I had some satisfaction in reminding Nesta, that probably Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn had stood where we were standing ; and, conjuring up a vision of stately knights and fair damosels with cockle-shells in their hats, I knelt on the stone, took the cup of clear water which Mr. Moorsom handed to me, shut my eyes and wished vehemently—that I might some day write a book which should go through five editions and be reviewed in the *Quarterly*. When I rose, I had a great deal of banter to endure about the earnestness with which I had wished. What could I have wished for ? Did I really believe it would do any good ? I could not say, but I certainly did feel sufficiently elated at having succeeded in wishing the right wish at the right moment, not to be at all troubled by my companions' ridicule. Miss Moorsom had so far lost faith in the holy water as to be disinclined to try her fate again. Mr. Moorsom insisted on

wishing after Nesta. He dipped the cup once more into the well, and held it up without rising from his knees. Nesta came near, looked down at the stone, and stood musing for some minutes with her eyes fixed on the cross. I, with my antiquarian fancies still in my mind, could not help thinking that standing thus, she presented to us as pretty a picture as any wandering damosel of olden time ever gave her knight. She had taken off her bonnet, her soft brown hair hung rather lower on her neck than usual, the long drooping eye-lashes touched her cheeks, her lips met in a sweet grave smile, her hands were clasped behind her, and her light figure bent forward a little as she looked down into the well. And if devotion, too strong for words to utter, could transform Mr. Moorsom into a fit representative of an attendant knight, there was no denying that his up-turned face and almost reverent attitude expressed it as truly as the most exacting lady could require. For a second or two I had this picture to contemplate, then, just as I expected Nesta to kneel down; she drew a step backwards, and, with the colour rushing into her face, she begged Mr. Moorsom's pardon for having kept him waiting so long, but she had made up her mind not to wish. Mr. Moorsom threw the cup back into the well without reply; it span round and round in circles and then sank. Nesta and I stood looking at it rather blankly, and Mr. Moorsom sprang up and betook himself to knocking the dust from his knees. It was a relief to us all when Miss Moorsom remarked that it was time we began our walk homewards, and set us the example by moving from the well. We had about half a mile to walk to the village. At first we were a very silent party, the few remarks I made not being followed up by my companions. After a time I perceived that Mr. Moorsom was instructing his sister to walk quickly on with me, and leave him and Nesta behind. She complied, giving me an audible hint that she was anxious for my company; but I resolutely stuck to Nesta's side, regulating my pace with hers so carefully, that no manœuvre of the other two could separate us. At last the village spire came in sight, and Mr. Moorsom, in despair, slackened his pace to a slow walk, and said, turning to Nesta.

"May I ask you one question?"

Nesta looked to see if I was safe at her side, and then answered, "Yes, certainly, as many as you like."

"I will only ask one—was it because *I* held the water for you, that you would not drink?"

Hitherto, he had been torturing his hands into every possible painful posture; as he spoke, he suddenly stood still, looking firmly—almost with an air of dignity into Nesta's face—as he waited for her answer. She returned his look, a little surprised, but not embarrassed.

"No, indeed," she said. "Why should I mind your holding the water? I believe I was not thinking of the water or of you just then."

It was curious to see on Mr. Moorsom's face, how expressions of relief and mortification followed each other. He was silent for a minute and walked on again.

"Then," he said in a voice not vexed, only a little hurt and very humble; "may I ask what prevented your drinking? Why did you change your mind?" Nesta once more looked up and smiled frankly.

"I don't mind telling you, because I think you will understand. It was looking at that cross that made me change my mind. I felt that if I knelt down, and if a real wish came into my heart, it would be a prayer; and I dare not wish."

"But why not?" asked Mr. Moorsom, eagerly. "Are not all earnest wishes prayers? I meant to have wished. I, too, should have thought of the cross and of the hundreds of people who had knelt in faith upon it; and my wish should have been a prayer, the most earnest I ever breathed."

The deep feeling with which these words were said did not startle Nesta. She was pre-occupied in following out the course of her own thoughts.

"It is not that I am afraid of praying," she went on; "or that I think it wrong to pray everywhere, about everything. I don't myself quite understand why just then I could not kneel down. If I had had a wish ready, as you say you had, I might have done so. It was because I had not planned what to wish, and I feared what might come."

"You could not have a wrong wish."

"Oh, I hope not. But one feels sometimes that it is so much happier not to wish. If any great good came, one had rather not have wished for it beforehand."

"It is like you to feel that; thank you for explaining your thought. No friend of yours would ever choose that you should have time to wish. You are a sort of person to whom

every blessing ought to come as a surprise, before your mind has been troubled with a thought about it."

"Do you think so?" said Nesta, gently shaking her head. "Oh no! that would be very bad for me. I ought to have my share of trouble and disappointment, as well as anybody else. Why should not I?"

"I cannot tell you why—I can feel why."

The last sentence was spoken hesitatingly, and Nesta received it with a start of surprise, and a perplexed look at me. What had she been doing? She had allowed herself to be drawn from her fence-work of reserve, and she did not know how much of the new, strange feelings that were perplexing her own mind she had unwittingly betrayed to others. Her start and blush, and the nervous haste with which she began to make common-place remarks to me, were, I thought, an unfortunate end to a conversation in itself calculated to convey a mistaken impression. I felt that if Nesta had been quite the Nesta of old times—if there had been no disturbing thoughts in her heart, she would not have acted or spoken as she had done that day. Since this was clear to me, how could I expect it to escape the eyes of one who was watching her so closely, and who was sure to interpret every unusual sign of emotion according to his own wishes?

I was vexed, but I could hardly be very angry with Mr. Moorsom for looking gravely satisfied and happy during the rest of our walk—for getting into gay spirits during our drive home, or for telling his mother at least twenty times during the evening, that our day at Walsingham had been the most successful, the happiest he had ever had in his life.

After tea, the dusty volume containing the history of Norfolk was hunted up from the library, and while Sir John snored loudly in his chair, and Miss Moorsom nodded on the sofa, Mr. Moorsom seated himself between Nesta and me and read extracts in a low voice, pausing now and then to ask us a question, and when our answer was confirmed by a statement in the book, never failing to call on his mother to admire our extraordinary proficiency in English history. I had hoped that some note or message from Lady Helen, to fix the time for our return to Broadlands on Monday, would have arrived for us during the day. Nesta and I were both a little disconcerted when we found that none had come.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough, thou know'st thy estimate.
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing,
My bonds in thee are all determinate."

SHAKESPEARE.

SUNDAY morning brought me a very welcome letter from my mother, the contents of which relieved my mind of its most painful perplexity. My mother's thoughts were turning homewards. Some chance word in my last letter (I really had not intended to say anything to make her uneasy) had made her suspect that we were no longer happy at Broadlands, and, with such a thought in her mind, she could not have a moment's peace till we were all safe at home again. She was now, she told me, quite determined not to be detained against her will any longer. Rosamond was really well enough to do without her, and Hilary had promised to arrange to travel home with her, so she should not have the pain of leaving him behind. In less than a week she thought we might hope to meet. Hilary could not leave Morfa till next Thursday, but, if we pleased, we might join them in London on that day. The letter ended with warm expressions of delight at the thought of our speedy reunion. I should have shared her joy, if I could have hoped that Nesta would like the thought of returning home as well as I did. Not quite knowing how the news would affect her, I slipped the letter in my pocket when I had finished reading it, determined to wait for a quiet time to read and discuss it with her.

Quiet times—or at least opportunities of being alone—were not easily obtained by guests at Deepdale, and on Sunday least of all days. From the breakfast-table we hurried to the Sunday-school; from school to church; from church to visit some old people in the village; then came an early dinner; and the greater part of the afternoon was passed in the school, where Nesta and I were set to teach a shy group of country children, who appeared to find our way of talking as difficult to understand as we did theirs.

"Never mind their not understanding you," Miss Moorsom said to Nesta when she apologized for not having been able

to persuade her scholars to do anything but laugh when she spoke to them ; " Never mind, they will soon get used to you. I will put you in the way. Of course we did not expect that you would teach all at once as well as I do."

" Thank you," said Nesta, " But you know, I shall not be here next Sunday. I was only sorry that one afternoon had been spent so unprofitably."

" Ah, I forgot. Well, we shall see," answered Miss Moorsom, looking round at her brother, who, having dismissed his class of boys, was approaching our end of the room to know how we had got on, and to hope earnestly that we were not tired.

When we returned home from the school, there was an hour's breathing-time before the early tea which preceded evening church. It appeared to be the family habit to spend this hour in pacing up and down the garden. For one or two turns Nesta and I contrived to keep together, but we were out-manceuvred before long. Lady Moorsom called Miss Moorsom to come into the house and help her to prepare some medicine for a sick child, and Sir John provokingly took the same moment to insist that I should go with him to the kitchen-garden. He should like to show me how well his fruit-trees looked, and to tell me something about his management of them, which I might write to Hilary. He did not ask little Miss Nesta to come too, because he did not give her credit for having any interest in gardening. Sorely against my inclination, I was obliged to follow him, and leave Nesta to make the best she could of her *tête-à-tête*.

Sir John kept me lingering about the kitchen-garden, showing me one wonderful proof of the fertility of its soil after another, for some time after the bell rang for tea. When at last we entered the drawing-room, we found Miss Moorsom pouring out the tea, and Mr. Moorsom standing by her, wearing, I perceived at once, an alarmed and penitent expression on his face. Lady Moorsom and Nesta were both missing, and, in answer to my inquiries, I learned from Miss Moorsom that her mother had thought Nesta looking rather tired and feverish when she came in from her walk, and that she had taken her up stairs to give her a globule of arnica, which she thought would be better for her than tea.

Lady Moorsom met me just as I was leaving the room to seek Nesta, and begged me to stay and take my tea. The

medicine she had given Nesta would do more good if she remained alone for half an hour after swallowing it.

She had too much faith in her remedy to trouble herself further about a patient who had taken it ; but the other members of the family could not say enough about their regret and anxiety. Sir John, I thought, said a little too much. "He had flattered himself," he observed, "that Miss Nesta would have condescended to make tea for him that Sunday evening. It would have been a pretty sight to have seen her sitting at the head of the table making tea ;" and then I thought a confusion came in his senses, and I tried not to hear a sentence which seemed to imply that making tea at the head of the table would be Nesta's natural employment on future Sunday evenings.

I seized the first opportunity to make my escape from the drawing-room, and hastened to our room. There I found Nesta pacing up and down with quick, impatient steps, her hands clasped close together, and a burning flush on her face. She did not stop walking when I entered.

"My darling Nesta, what is the matter ? Lady Moorsom said you were tired. Why do you make yourself worse by walking up and down ?"

"Let me walk, Janet ; I can think best when I am walking, and I want to think. I can't tell you what has troubled me before church-time, because one of us must go to church, and if you know what I know, you will not be able."

"Yes, I shall. I dare say I shall not think it so bad as you do."

"You will, for it is very bad. Oh, Janet, we ought never to have come here. There has been a terrible mistake ! Oh, how did it happen ? I wonder whether *everybody* at Broadlands knows ?—Charlie and everybody ? I must walk about as quick as I can ; I dare not begin to wonder about *that* !"

"Now, Nesta, do have pity on me, and tell me what you mean. Is it something Mr. Moorsom said to you in the garden that has put you into this state of mind ?—if so, I think you are making too much of it. We have nothing to blame ourselves for. You are not responsible for his feelings, though you may be sorry for them."

"*His* feelings ! Oh, I suppose there is that too—I ought to be sorry about that too. But, oh, Jenny ! I am so selfish—I am only thinking about myself, and about how my

coming here must have looked to people at Broadlands. It was not precisely about his own feelings that Mr. Moorsom spoke in the garden, it was about a letter he wrote to Lady Helen before we came here, which he thinks I have seen and approved of. She has let *him* think so—perhaps she will let every one think so. Oh, how can she be so cruel to me! But there, they are coming for you—I hear Miss Moorsom's step on the stairs. Don't let her come in! Please, dear Janet, contrive that I shall be left alone for a time."

"Well, then, promise not to walk yourself to death before I come back," I said. And as Miss Moorsom's hand was by that time on the door-handle, I was obliged to run away, leaving a kiss on poor Nesta's burning cheek.

It was a relief to find that I was really late for church. One detachment of our party had started some time ago, and Miss Moorsom was too intent on catching them up to be disposed to question me.

I hoped that our hurried walk and our lateness would account satisfactorily for the disturbed looks which I knew I brought with me into the quiet church. I sat down, and stood up, and tried to command my attention, but the service seemed to go on round me in a dream. I perceived that Mr. Moorsom was making the same efforts to attend, and with about the same amount of success. His sister would certainly have given a black look to any child in her class who had been guilty of so many changes of position during the sermon as he was.

When the service ended, and we all left the church, I found myself consigned to Mr. Moorsom's company during the walk home, while the rest of the party adjourned to the Rectory, according to established custom on Sunday evenings.

Mr. Moorsom said we would walk round by the field-path because it was the quietest. Then I knew that I was to be taken into confidence, and that I should have the whole mystery of Nesta's trouble explained before I reached the house. Shyness got the better of curiosity, from the moment we turned into the solitary fields, and I wished heartily that the walk was well over. For a time we paced on in ominous silence.

Mr. Moorsom was the first to speak. "I see you too are angry with me," he said, "and I am not surprised; you have a right to be. You must let me justify myself."

"No, pray don't," I said, eagerly. "I do not know that I have any right to be angry."

"Yes, you have. You think I have said something to pain your sister, and thinking that you ought to be very angry. It would be quite unpardonable in me to say a word to trouble her while she is a guest in my father's house; I would not knowingly trouble her at any time. I would hold my tongue for ever rather than give her a moment's pain. You don't believe me—you don't understand how miserable I am, or you would say something to comfort me. Tell me, perhaps, that she is not so very bitterly angry, or show me how to make peace with her."

"Nay," I answered, "you are very unreasonable. What can I say when I don't know the cause of either your trouble or Nesta's?"

"She is troubled, then?—I *have* annoyed her? Well, I must hold my tongue; I cannot make you understand how miserable the thought makes me."

"Perhaps you had better tell me what you have said; then I may understand."

"But you must not be angry. I must interest you on my side—I must, indeed. I will begin by acknowledging that I was wrong; I ought not to have spoken, I ought to have waited. But I was so anxious to make your sister understand how grateful we all are for her kindness in coming here. I wanted her to know how thoroughly my father and mother had shared my anxiety, and how they had rejoiced with me when they heard, that after reading my letter to Lady Helen, you and your sister saw no reason for depriving us of the pleasure of your visit here."

"But we did not read your letter to Lady Helen," I said. "We neither of us ever heard or read a word that was in it. Oh, Mr. Moorsom, I am so sorry and ashamed."

The colour left his face, and for two or three minutes we stood still, silent. "Then I must indeed have seemed presumptuous," he said, drawing a long breath, and walking on. "I have been deceiving myself; my three days' happiness has been only a dream; but, Miss Scott, I cannot have heard you rightly. Lady Helen cannot have behaved so deceitfully to us all! She told you something about my letter—she made you understand that your accepting this invitation was to be a sign favourable to my hopes—she hinted it at

least? You knew why we were all so anxious about your coming?"

I shook my head. "I would not deceive you for the world. I am very sorry, but we did not know."

"And if your sister had known? No, don't answer in a hurry. Don't say she would not have come. If I had received such an answer from Lady Helen, it would have been a bitter pain; but I should have accepted it without a word. Now, after these three days, after I have permitted myself to hope, I cannot give up so easily. You must give me some encouragement for the future. I have felt all along that it must be a work of time. How could I look at your sister and think anything else? If I served for her fourteen years, I should not expect her to love me at the end as I love her. Why should she? but my great love might win some return. I dare say you are laughing at me. I can only say what I feel in commonplace words, that don't half express it; but indeed they are true words."

"I am sure they are," I answered; "and I am very sorry—"

"I wish you would not say that you are sorry. It sounds like telling me not to hope"

"But I must speak the truth. I must undo the false impression Lady Helen has given you."

"Well, you have undone it. I quite understand that I must not hope from anything that has passed, but there is all the future. Cannot you help me? Cannot you advise me?"

"I am afraid I must advise you to forget us as soon as we are gone back to London."

"That I shall never do. You don't know me. I loved your sister the first moment I saw her. I felt she was the one in all the world to me. I shall not change. I had rather be miserable and love her than cease to love her, thinking her the best."

"Well, you must settle that with yourself. I can only promise always to speak the truth to you whenever you talk to me. Even if I were capable of trying to influence Nesta, I am sure you would not wish me to do it."

"I don't know—and yet I do know, that I would not wish for anything but *her* greatest possible happiness. I honestly think that I could value her better than any one else: that is the excuse I make to myself for persevering in trying to

win her. I could give her up to one who loved her better than I, if such a one *could* be ; but the thought of her not being valued enough is so terrible."

"But why should you think of such a thing?" I cried. "When she has her father and mother and brothers and myself to value her, surely we, who have known her all our life, can do that as well as you, who had not seen her three months ago?"

"No, I don't think you can do it quite as well ; but you don't understand me. I was not comparing myself with you. I was fearing—I don't want to embarrass and perplex you more than you are already perplexed, but love is quick-sighted, and I have sometimes feared—"

"You must not embarrass and perplex me, indeed," I interrupted. "I am quite troubled enough with my own thoughts without your inventing fresh fears for me."

"Well, I beg your pardon. What right have I now to advise or interfere? I will only ask one thing more. You will not let this unhappy explanation shorten your visit at Deepdale?"

"We always intended to leave Deepdale on Monday," I answered.

"To return to Broadlands?"

"Yes, till Thursday, when I hope we shall go home."

"Could you not stay here till Thursday?"

"Hardly, I think."

"You cannot imagine what a relief it would be to me, if you would ; though I hope you know how careful I would be not to trouble you. Your sister should not even guess the depth of my disappointment."

"I cannot see that it would be right for us to stay. Please let us walk a little more quickly. I am anxious to get back to Nesta, and tired too. Your father and mother will be home first—we have walked so slowly."

"We are close to the house. This gate leads into the garden. I will wish you good night here, for I see you want to get rid of me. Tell my mother I am gone for a walk, and that I shall not be in at prayer-time."

He opened the gate for me, shook hands, and strode away across the fields in the already deepening twilight. I ran through the garden, hoping to reach the house, and shut myself up in Nesta's room, before the rest of the party returned.

I was disappointed. Miss Moorsom, still in walking apparel, met me in the hall, and took me by force into the library with her, shutting the door behind us with an air of mystery.

"Come, now, don't run away from me," she began; "I do think *I* have as good a right to hear as any one. There is no one in the world loves Richard as I do; and now that all seems settled I don't mind telling you how much I helped. At first there were difficulties—papa and mamma are always prejudiced against Lady Helen's friends. If I had not praised your sister so much they might never have approved, and Richard would never have chosen any one they did not cordially like. Of course your sister deserves to be praised, but it was, all the same, generous in me to be as ready as I was to take to her. It is not so easy to give up being first with one's brother. You will find that out when your favourite brother falls in love."

"I don't know how to thank you all enough for your kindness," I began, faltering.

"Ah, that's right! I am so glad. You and I must make common cause. I suppose at the bottom of our hearts we shall both feel rather doleful; you will lose your sister, and—how odd it is! how little we thought, to be sure, that day when we all grumbled so at having to call on Lady Helen Carr, that we were going to see Richard's wife!"

"My dear Miss Moorsom, please don't," I said, as soon as I could get in a word. "You can't think how unhappy you make me. It is most generous in you to feel so kindly, but—but—it is not as you are imagining it to be."

"What! has not Richard asked her yet? What is all the commotion about then?"

"I wish I could tell you without giving you pain or seeming ungrateful—" I hesitated, and Miss Moorsom broke in,

"You cannot mean that he has asked her and that she has refused—refused Richard? She can't have understood him. I will just run up to her and explain; I know I shall set it all right with a word."

"Indeed, indeed!" I said, "it is I who must explain; there is no misunderstanding. You had better not go to Nesta."

"Refused Richard! She must be out of her mind—after accepting my mother's invitation, too! Why Richard wrote to Lady Helen, and asked her not to give the invitation till

she had ascertained that your sister was favourably disposed to him, and I thought it so ridiculous in him to have a doubt."

"Lady Helen never showed us your brother's letter, or we should not have come."

"You would not?—well!"

The amazed resentful expression that settled down on Miss Moorsom's face as she pronounced the last word haunted me for several days.

"Well, of course your sister has a right to judge for herself; but, I must say, I had a better opinion of her. She should not have trifled with my brother. She ought to have made up her mind sooner. His manner has been plain enough all along. The more I think about it, the more hurt and angry I am."

"We must submit to your anger," I said, mournfully; "for I think, as far as your knowledge of the circumstances goes, we deserve it. Will you ask Lady Moorsom to excuse our coming down stairs to-night? I must write to Lady Helen to ask her to send the carriage for us to-morrow. Will you see that some one takes my note to Broadlands early?"

"Yes, certainly. I will say nothing against your going early to-morrow; you will naturally wish it, and it will be best for us all."

"I think so. Good night."

I found Nesta anxiously waiting for my coming. The restless mood had passed away, but it had been followed by a fit of tears. I said all I could think of to comfort her; but, when I had been talking for some time, I discovered that my consolations were misdirected. The trouble for which I pitied her was not the one over which she was grieving. She was not nearly so sorry for Mr. Moorsom's disappointment as I had expected to find her. If it had been in her nature to be angry, she would have been angry with me for pitying him so heartily. She would not believe that he was so very unhappy; she wished I would not talk about him. The topic which absorbed her—to which she would recur again and again, after I had talked it down—was her own pain in finding that her feelings towards Mr. Moorsom had been so misunderstood by the party at Broadlands. She would believe that Lady Helen had honestly supposed her attached

to Mr. Moorsom, and yet she seemed to find the belief almost intolerable.

Finding, at last, that nothing I could say availed to soothe her, I changed the subject of our discourse by producing my mother's letter. Nesta bore the news contained in it better than I had expected. She no longer disliked the idea of leaving Norfolk; she was ready to go home the next day, she said. She should never be happy at Broadlands again, now, never!

Through all our talk, I could not help listening curiously to the noises in the house. I heard Miss Moorsom go up to her mother's room—and, after a long interval, the steps of the two descending the stairs, and I fancied the footfalls sounded ominous and angry. Then came the prayer bell very sharply pulled. By-and-by I heard Sir John's voice loud in conversation with his daughter as they went up to bed. Then came a long silence, broken at last by the shutting of the front door, which admitted Mr. Moorsom after his evening walk. It was foolish in me, but I was glad to know that he had actually returned. I did not, myself, entertain any fear that he had gone to the shore to drown himself; but I had a conviction that the rest of the household would feel more charitably towards us when they knew that he was safe under his own roof again. About an hour after his return, when I had finished writing my note to Lady Helen, we heard steps in the passage approaching our room—two sets of footsteps—one slow and somewhat stately, the other betraying painful efforts not to be heard. They stopped at our door and Lady Moorsom entered alone. Her manner was cold, but her face showed traces of emotion.

"I have come," she said, "to inquire how my patient is. I did not like to go to bed without ascertaining that there was not much amiss. My dear," turning to Nesta, "how are you?"

Nesta signed to me to answer for her, but I would not. I guessed that the person whose quick breathing I could hear outside the door, would go away more satisfied if he could be assured of her well-being by her own sweet voice.

Left to herself, Nesta made a great effort, put back her hair from her face, looked up steadily, and said that she felt perfectly well and did not want anything.

Lady Moorsom stood a minute with her candle in her

hand, looking at Nesta, and Nesta looked back at her. There was a strange wistful expression in Lady Moorsom's face; proud woman as she was, for that second or two she was humble before Nesta. For the first time in all her life, perhaps, she had seen her only son unhappy for a cause which she had no power to remedy, and for an instant she felt inferior to the person who could change his grief into joy, if she only would. If Nesta's face had shown the least relenting, if she had looked down and allowed her tear-swollen eyelids to be seen instead of her quiet eyes, I believe Lady Moorsom would have thrown her arms round her neck, and forgetting dignity and pride—everything but her son's sorrow—she would have entreated Nesta to think better of it, and make him happy. No relenting came over Nesta's face, however, and as Lady Moorsom met her steady inquiring gaze, her own countenance hardened.

"If you are really well and do not want anything, there is no reason why I should keep you up longer," she said, stiffly. "Good night." And she turned away, shutting the door after her with an air which made me feel like an obstinately naughty child, who had refused a pardon offered by its elders, though he is longing for it all the time.

"Well, it is, at all events, too late now for ever, Nesta," I said.

"Too late for what?" asked Nesta; but I would not answer her, having enough to do to settle in my own thoughts whether I did or did not regret the way in which this day's events had ended. A few days before I should not have had any doubt about it; but Mr. Moorsom had risen rapidly in my good opinion since we came to Deepdale, and his confidence that evening had quite won my sympathy to his side. His kindness to us the next morning obliged me to think better of him than ever. I don't know how we should have got over the breakfast-hour, or borne the chill greetings to which Lady and Miss Moorsom treated us, if it had not been for his considerate efforts to re-assure us, and oblige the rest of the party to treat us with due consideration. He seemed to have laid aside his usual awkwardness for the time; the deep feeling so strongly roused put all trifling embarrassments aside, and enabled him for once to express the true dignity and nobleness of his character in his outward bearing. Nobleness sounds an exaggerated word now, but I should

not have felt it unsuitable that morning when I saw the expression of his face as he returned Nesta's timid morning greeting; and marked the quiet watchfulness which saved us from feeling the lack of attention shown by the ladies of the family.

In spite of all his efforts, the breakfast-hour passed uncomfortably enough. Sir John rose from the table first, and sauntered out of the room, saying that he would see us all again by-and-bye. Then Mr. Moorsom got up, and, without looking at any one in particular, remarked that he had ordered his horse to come round early, for he thought of riding to Norwich that day; he did not know exactly when he should return, perhaps he might be detained from home a few days. I saw an appealing look towards his mother at the last sentence, but her impassive countenance gave him no encouragement.

"I see no reason why you should remain from home, Richard," she said. "I should much prefer your returning to-night—much prefer it."

"I am sorry to disoblige you, but I am afraid I cannot," he answered, quietly. "I shall certainly not return till to-morrow, so it must be good-bye." He walked up to his mother's chair, stooped to kiss her cheek, and whispered something in her ear. Then he shook hands with his sister, who disconcerted me by puckering up her face into an expression of doleful grief, and then plunging it into her handkerchief.

His farewell to me was an emphatic "Do not hurry away." "Do not suffer yourselves to be put to any inconvenience."

Nesta's turn came last. She held out her hand timidly, coldly. He held it for an instant in a speechless clasp, looking down on her half-averted face, with eyes which seemed as if they were taking their farewell of light. Then dropping it, with a half-articulated "God bless you," he left the room, and the next minute we heard the sound of his horse's feet receding down the road. Miss Moorsom rushed to the window to look after him, as if she never expected him to come back again; and Nesta profited by the little commotion to slip unobserved from the room. I was following, when Lady Moorsom stopped me.

"You are expecting Lady Helen Carr to call for you

to-day, I understand, Miss Scott. Do you know at what time she will be here? I much fear it will not be in my power to see her."

I was obliged to confess that I was ignorant of Lady Helen's intentions; I had some fear she might not send or call for us. Her health was so uncertain, I pleaded, one was afraid of depending on her.

"And rightly afraid," Lady Moorsom emphasized. "Neither as a friend nor an hostess is Lady Helen a person on whom it is safe to depend. I should be sorry in any degree to imitate her conduct. I promised my son just now to tell you, that you and your sister are welcome to stay here as long as it is convenient to you to do so. If you prefer to leave us, we shall be" (with a visible effort to get out the word) "sorry to lose you."

I thanked her, but said I thought we had better return to Broadlands. We had only three days more to stay in Norfolk."

"And another change of air may be good for your sister. I am sorry to see her look so pale this morning. If it will be any comfort to her, you may tell her that, on further consideration, I approve of the decision she made yesterday. I think she is right to decline a position, for the responsibilities of which she feels herself unequal. It would have been a great change to her—a formidable change. I am not surprised that she should shrink from it. When she is a little older, I hope she may settle happily in her own position in life."

I had nothing to reply, but that I was glad Lady Moorsom approved of Nesta's conduct; and then I stood stupidly silent, longing to think of something more dignified to say, till Miss Moorsom relieved me by proposing a plan I could welcome cordially. She would be very happy to drive us to Broadlands, she said, as I was so anxious to go at once, and so much afraid Lady Helen would forget to send for us. The pony-carriage held three, and it was but a pleasant drive. If I really wished to go, there need be no difficulty about it. It was for me to decide.

Of course I decided to go. The bell was rung immediately, and the carriage ordered to be ready in two hours' time.

I went up stairs to prepare for our departure, determined to think only of the embarrassments we were leaving, and not

to suffer myself to be depressed by misgivings as to the kind of welcome we should receive when we had exchanged one offended hostess for another.

When the carriage drove to the door and we were ready to start, the whole family seemed to feel a sudden relenting towards us. Lady Moorsom came out into the hall with a little packet of medicines in one hand, and a tea-spoon full of cold water in the other, which she insisted on Nesta's swallowing, while she explained to her the contents of the papers, and entreated her to give the medicines a fair trial. They were designed to counteract the ill effects of undue agitation of mind. I wondered whether Mr. Moorsom would be required to submit to similar remedies.

Sir John, meanwhile, bustled in from the garden. "What did all this nonsense about going away in such a hurry mean? What would Richard say when he heard about it? He had intended to have had a little talk with us both. Halls were not places for private conversations, but if he had had an opportunity he might have said something. An old man's words might have proved worth listening to. Well, well, since it distressed us, he would say no more. He could not bear to see tears in Miss Ernestine's pretty eyes. He would only shake hands, and hope we should all meet again, with better understanding of each other, before long."

Even Miss Moorsom mysteriously pointed out an upright case in the hall, and informed me that it held a very light bow, which Richard had ordered to be sent from Norwich, and which had just arrived. He had hoped, Miss Moorson said, to teach Nesta to shoot with it, and now it must be sent back to the shop unopened. Nesta had seemed to promise so well. How Richard would have enjoyed teaching her! Well, there was no use saying more. The ponies did not like standing. Would we get in?

The leave-takings were over at last. Miss Moorsom started her ponies at a canter, and in a moment or two we lost sight of pleasant, sunny, kindly Deepdale, which I felt would always hereafter rise up before me in my day-dreams as having once been Nesta's possible home.

CHAPTER XX.

"Then in that time and place I spake to her,
Requiring, though I knew it was my own,
Yet, for the pleasure that I took to hear,
Requiring at her hand the greatest gift,
A woman's heart, the heart of her I loved."

TENNYSON.

"No explanations, my dear Janet, no explanations. I do not want to hear any Deepdale gossip. You have paid your visit, and Lady Moorsom has sent you back safe and well. I am obliged to her, and very glad to see you, and that is all we have to say to each other on the subject. Now take off your bonnet, and we will go down stairs to luncheon."

Thus ended the only attempt I had courage to make at remonstrating with Lady Helen for her unkindness in allowing us to accept Lady Moorsom's invitation without explaining the conditions under which it was given.

During luncheon Lady Helen told us she had had a note from Charlie, fixing Wednesday for his return to Broadlands; but she said nothing about Mr. Carr, and, as he did not make his appearance, I concluded that Lady Helen had gained her point, and that he had taken his departure for Morfa. In the afternoon Lady Helen went out for a drive alone, and Nesta and I wandered about the house and garden, and amused ourselves as we best could. Clouds began to gather in the sky towards evening, and a chill mist crept up from the sea. The wind, which had slept for many days, began its moan in the bell-turret on the roof, and through all the creaks and crevices of the neglected house.

"I don't wonder at your thinking this a desolate place when you first came here," I observed to Nesta. "What a contrast it is to Deepdale! How forlorn and wretched it looks!"

"It is empty to-day," said Nesta. "But did I really call it a forlorn place when I first came here? How long that seems ago! I had much rather be here, even as it looks to-day, than at Deepdale."

Lady Helen returned from her drive chilled and shivering, and full of complaints about the sudden change in the weather. She ordered a fire to be lighted in her boudoir, and there we

assembled for an early tea, having agreed that, since there were no gentlemen in the house, we would dispense with dinner.

I thought that the evening would seem very long, but it did not. During the first hour or so Lady Helen now and then looked at her watch, and seemed to be listening for some expected sounds. As time passed on, and they did not come, her spirits rose. She grew sociable, and talked to us of her early days, telling us anecdotes of distinguished persons she had known, and describing places she had seen, and incidents that had befallen her, during her many years of foreign travel. When she was tired of talking she asked Nesta to sing, making her observe that she had caused the piano to be moved to its winter place, within the shelter of the curtain that divided her boudoir from the drawing-room. Nesta had not enjoyed the conversation as much as I had ; she had been dreaming while we talked. I saw it was an effort to her to rouse herself to sing. When she had made it, however, she became so engrossed in her music, that she seemed to forget her auditors altogether. She went on playing portions that pleased her, over and over again, in a dreamy way, as if she hardly knew what she was doing. Lady Helen thoroughly enjoyed music, and especially, she said, Nesta's music. I often thought she seemed to grow younger as she listened—I don't mean that grey hairs and wrinkles put themselves out of sight, but that the expression of her countenance changed, and for the moment, I could imagine how she had looked in the old days when my mother had thought her so charming, and when Mr. Lester had coveted her for a daughter. That night she looked almost happy, as she lay back in her chair with her eyes shut and a smile on her lips, listening, while Nesta rambled on from solemn chant to airy romance. At last Nesta began to sing a translation of a German song, of which the melancholy air and words pleased her so much, that she could not weary of repeating them, or throw her heart thoroughly enough to satisfy herself into the pathetic breathing of the words. It was something about parting. I don't remember the words exactly—it was one sentence only which Nesta dwelt upon :—

“ Parting, parting is such pain,
Parting is such bitter woe.”

Again and again—always with a new wail of pain—the words

sounded through the room. At length Lady Helen opened her eyes and interrupted the song.

"My dear Neta," she said, "I can't have that again. Do you want to break my heart with imaginary woe? You must be a witch indeed, for your wail about 'Parting, parting' has brought tears into my eyes. Yet such a cold-hearted wretch am I, that I really do not think there is a single person in the world from whom I should feel parting *bitter woe*. Bitter woe has come to me often enough, and may come again, but not in that shape. I suppose I do not care enough *now* for any one to feel *such pain*. It is a happy thing for me!"

"But not exactly a pleasant thing for your only son to hear." Two hands softly put the curtains aside as these words were spoken, and Mr. Carr's face and figure appeared in the opening.

Every one started, and, under cover of the general surprise, I hoped that the vivid colour which suffused Neta's face would pass unobserved. Lady Helen put her hand to her head.

"Shafto, how could you startle me so? You know I can't bear it."

"I am very sorry; but why should my coming startle you? May I not come home after I have been out, if I like?"

He had crossed the room now, and the light fell upon his face. I had never before seen it look so brightly content, so playfully happy.

"I did not expect you to come home to-night," Lady Helen answered. "I thought you were going to stay at the Walsingham's till the end of the week. You said so."

"Nay, *you* said so. When I left home I was in far too restless a mood to undertake to stay anywhere till the end of the week. My good genius brought me safe home to-night through the mist. If any one has a right to be startled it is I, who, coming into a dark room, not expecting to hear anything particular, found the place full of such unearthly music, that I declare I had not courage to draw the curtain, till your characteristic sentence, mother, made it clear to me that I was in no better place than my own home—to which I see you are determined *not* to welcome me."

He stood near her for a minute as if expecting an answer;

then, turning round and passing me, he walked straight to the piano, where Nesta was standing.

"I had not the least hope of finding *you* here when I started to come home this misty afternoon ; yet I could not help coming."

He said no more than this, and then Nesta held out her hand and he his ; but a minute after this simple greeting Lady Helen's eyes met mine, and the conviction in our hearts was so strong that we could not help telegraphing it to each other. "It is all over," Lady Helen's eyes said ; "I have lost. Something stronger than my strong will has come in and baffled all my manœuvres." I, too, felt that something had come. From Lady Helen's despairing eyes I turned to look at the two, who still stood side by side. To Nesta I thought it was peace that had come—peace and rest. Her face expressed no embarrassment or surprise ; she had been unhappy and now she was happy ; she had felt herself lonely, and now a look had made her at one with all the world again. She had no room in her heart for any other consciousness than that. Mr. Carr's face, as he stood for a minute or two silent by Nesta's side, was less easy to read ; his lips smiled, but his brow was slightly contracted. I thought he looked like a person to whom some sudden knowledge had come, and who was occupied in forming a resolution upon it. His thoughtful mood only lasted for that moment ; he was the first to break the silence. He drew a chair to the piano, sat down, and began to talk lightly, playfully, about his misty ride home, and the incidents of our visit to Deepdale. Most of what he said was addressed to Nesta, and she, usually so silent and shy, found no difficulty in answering him. The talk was all about nothing ; foolish chatter it seemed to me, for which I was in no mood. I had never before known either Nesta or Mr. Carr interest themselves so eagerly about trifles. Yet the tones of their voices seemed to give meaning and importance to every word they said ; and now and then a low happy laugh reached my ears, the sound of which carried me back to my childish days, it conveyed such foolish, unnecessary gladness. Meanwhile, Lady Helen lay back on her sofa, with her eyes shut, and her hand pressed upon her heart. If ever a face expressed utter heart-sickness and weariness hers did, as she lay listening to the light sentences of that unmeaning, happy talk. I, not being able thoroughly

to enter into the feelings of any of my companions, stood on neutral ground, and, according to my wont, allowed my thoughts to fly to all manner of far-off speculations. I wondered how so great a gulf could be fixed between those who sat so close together that they could hear each other breathe. So great a gulf—it looked to me like the impassable gulf that for ever divides love from hatred, happiness from misery, heaven from hell. I understood, in that moment, how voices might be heard across it, faces might be discerned beyond it; and yet how utter might be the impossibility that any could pass from one side to the other.

At length the hours wore away, and Lady Helen's penance came to an end. She made no attempt to shorten it; she stayed up rather later than usual, and made, I thought, a show of being reluctant to disturb her son's conversation with Nesta.

I understood clearly that during her long meditation she had taken her part, and that no further watchfulness of hers would stand between Nesta and her fate. I certainly wished Nesta to return home unbound by any spoken words which my father might regret that she had heard; but I very much disliked having the task thrust upon me of guarding her from them. How I wished that the next two days were over!

Tuesday was one of those misty, cold autumn days which, coming at the end of a long period of fine weather, dispose country people to turn with zest to in-door occupations, to gather round wood-fires, and enjoy a foretaste of winter sociability. Our party was too small to separate under such circumstances, and after Lady Helen had sent down word that she should not venture to leave her room till afternoon, Nesta and I did not know how to refuse Mr. Carr's invitation to adjourn to his library, which was, he said, the only room in the draughty old house where a fire would burn brightly on a misty morning. The glowing wood-fire certainly did look very inviting as we caught a glimpse of it in crossing the cold hall, and when we had once been lured into the library to feel its warmth, we were easily persuaded to take up our abode there for the morning. Nesta brought her drawing-materials, and I some skeins of coloured wools which I had undertaken to wind for Lady Helen. Mr. Carr professed to have so much work on hand that he was thankful

to the rain for keeping him in-doors ; but though he talked of the opportunity a wet day offered for making up arrears of work, he did not seem disposed to turn its hours to much account.

There was some time lost in clearing the end of the table nearest the fire for Nesta's drawing-board. Mr. Carr, indeed, was willing to sweep papers and books to the floor, but my interest in them, and Nesta's respect, would not permit them to be so disposed of. Nesta gathered up the MS. pages with which the table was strewn, smoothing them out and laying them together with dexterous fingers. Now and then she asked permission to read a verse of which some word caught her attention, looking up after she had read with a glow on her cheek, and timid pleasure in her eye, to express her shy approbation. Mr. Carr soon abandoned even the pretence of employing himself, and remained, half-kneeling, on a *prie-dieu* chair, his arms crossed on the back, and his eyes following the movements of Nesta's small white hands. When the table was at last cleared, he remembered that he had promised to show her once more Comte de Gabalis's magic book, from which he had read the receipt for charming air-people. It had to be searched for, as is generally the case with professedly favourite books ; and during the search the table was once more laden with treasured volumes, every one of which proved to have some special claim on Nesta's attention.

At first I gave my help in turning the books over, but after a time, feeling that my assistance was not wanted, I turned my attention to my skeins of wool, which really must be wound before luncheon time. Pulling down long-neglected books from dusty shelves is not a good preparation for winding delicate coloured worsteds. I found that it was necessary for me to go up stairs and wash my hands. I did not hesitate to leave the room, I meant to be away so short a time ; and as Comte de Gabalis's book had just turned up, I thought the reading of the charm would occupy my companions till I came back again. It fell out that I was detained some minutes longer than I expected. In searching for some cards to wind my skeins upon, I upset an inkstand, and was obliged to spend some time in wiping up the ink and putting the table in order again. As I crossed the hall, I reproached myself for having left Nesta so long alone.

Might she not have felt embarrassed or troubled? I opened the door hastily, and was relieved to see that the reading of Comte de Gabalis was still going on. Nesta's head was bent down over the book, and Mr. Carr had left his old place behind her chair, and was kneeling on the ground by her side, the better to support the large volume she was reading. I came forward, and they both started, Mr. Carr springing to his feet so hastily that the open volume fell clattering to the ground. Nesta put up her hands over her face.

"It is only I," I said. "What is the matter?"

There was an awkward pause. I looked from one to the other, and the colour rushed to my face, and the words I would have spoken faltered on my lips. My eyes at last met Mr. Carr's, and he smiled the sweet grave smile that even I could not but allow made his face almost beautiful. From me he looked at Nesta, and, kneeling down again, he put up his hand and drew down hers from her face. She let him take her hand, but she moved the other so as to hide her eyes, from which large tears were slowly falling.

"Nesta," he said, "how long must I wait? you have not answered me. Tell your sister—tell her what I have said to you, and I will be patient, for I know you will answer me before I go. Ernestine—Nesta, my darling!"

It was only my terribly quick ears that enabled me to catch the last words, for they were spoken as softly as possible, and the speaker's head bent very low, till his lips touched her hand. Then he rose, passed me, and left the room. In a minute I was kneeling in the place he had left, with my arms round Nesta.

"Oh, Nesta, what have I done in leaving you?" I said. "I am so sorry."

She disengaged herself gently from my arms, and lifted her face to mine.

"Janet—such a strange thing, you will never believe it. He says he loves me—he has asked me to be his wife."

I did not know what to say. Seeing Nesta's tremulously happy face before me, I *could* not be as sorry to hear this as my conscience told me I ought to be. For a moment or two, I could only tell her how natural it seemed to me that every one should love her; but my first coherent words had to be words of warning.

"I wish he had waited to ask you till we were at home,

Nesta," I said. "What will papa say? What will Lady Helen think of us? He ought to have waited."

"He says,"—Nesta's voice sank to a shy whisper—"he says he *could* not let me go away without knowing. He was so unhappy when we went to Deepdale. He believed what Lady Helen told him about our going. I am so sorry he thought *that*, even for three days."

"And, Nesta, what have you said? You have not promised?"

"I!—how could I? It is all so strange, I can hardly believe that it is true. Can he think me good enough? Can he be sure that it is really me—just as I am, that he loves? Perhaps he fancies that I am as clever as you or Charlie."

"Nesta, darling, you must not be angry with me, but I am wondering whether papa will think him good enough for you."

"He must, when he knows him," Nesta answered, proudly.

"And Lady Helen?"

Nesta's countenance fell. "Ah, that is very sad, but—I—we will not do anything to make her angry; we will wait. Perhaps when she knows he really cares for me—and he says he does, Janet—she will mind it less."

I got up, and began to walk up and down the room. "She has behaved cruelly to us," I said, "and I cannot bear to hear you speak so humbly. She sent us out of the way for fear her son should ask you, and now, because he has spoken, we feel like traitors. He ought not to have asked you here,—I cannot forgive him for that. Oh, how I wish I had never left you this morning!"

I could not persuade Nesta cordially to join in that wish, but she readily agreed that she ought not to give Mr. Carr the answer he had asked for, as long as we remained guests in his mother's house. She was as much alive as I to the dread of doing anything which Lady Helen might reasonably consider underhand; and promised readily that she would keep close to me during the rest of our visit, and not suffer herself to be tempted to say a word that could not be said openly. We had time to talk out our first wonder and excitement, for no one came near us during the rest of the morning.

When we were summoned at last into Lady Helen's presence, I think we both felt ashamed of the deceit of

appearing before her as if nothing had happened. I soon saw that we need not trouble ourselves with this scruple; Lady Helen's eyes were quick enough to read through any concealment of ours. She had only to look at Nesta's downcast face, and to observe how Mr. Carr, after one hasty glance, carefully avoided looking again, or embarrassing her with the least attention, to know what had happened, nearly as well as if she had been in the study all the morning.

I don't know how we got through the long afternoon and evening. Every one knows how strange and unreal ordinary occupations seem, when the whole heart and mind are secretly occupied with some one absorbing thought. We all four, eat and talked and walked about as those that dream. I think that Nesta and Mr. Carr fared the best of the four, judging by their countenances; theirs was at least a happy dream. Nesta seldom spoke, but when she did, she would have been blind indeed, if she had not perceived that by one person present, every word she said was received as gratefully as if, like the princess in the fairy tale, her lips had distilled pearls. When I noticed the bright light that shone in her eyes, whenever she ventured to raise them for a moment from her work, my heart ached with anxiety for her. It was well for her to promise to be silent, but I felt it was a silence of the lips only. None the less would the words spoken that day colour all her future life. When we were alone together at night, Nesta and I sat on the old oak chest she had described to me in her first letter, and talked over the events of our visit at Broadlands, and I discovered how widely different from mine had been her experience of its weeks and days and hours. One image, unconsciously to herself, had filled them all.

"Janet," she said, when she had come to the end of her story, "it is wonderful how things grow. This morning I found the thought of his love so strange, I hardly dared to look at it. Now, do you know, it is not strange—anything else would be strange. It seems the one certain necessary thing—the whole of my life; the history I shall have to give of myself when I die."

"Oh, Nesta," I said, half frightened, half reproachfully, "think of what you are saying—'the whole of your life.'"

The awe-struck tone of my voice startled her.

"Is it wrong?" she asked, consideringly—"it sounds

wrong; but, Janet, I am afraid it is true. I hope God won't be angry with me, and that if it is wrong, He will show me how to make it right."

No fear but that He would, I thought, since Nesta asked it so earnestly; but I was such a coward, it was just that leading I dreaded for her; I feared so much that it might be along a path of pain.

The sun shone brightly the next morning, and Lady Helen favoured us with her company at breakfast, for which I was thankful.

On leaving the breakfast-room Mr. Carr made an effort to intercept Nesta before she could reach the door; but she was too quick for him, and glided past before he had time to speak a word. I shook my head in answer to an appealing look at me, and followed more leisurely.

How would the day pass, I wondered? I really did feel some pity for his anxiety, but not too much. He ought not to have brought it upon himself.

Half an hour afterwards, when Nesta and I were trying to occupy ourselves in Lady Helen's boudoir, Mr. Carr presented himself at the door, and addressed his mother. He had come, he said, to advise Miss Scott to take a walk to the shore. He was sure Lady Helen would agree that she must not lose this last bright morning.

"Go, Janet," Lady Helen said, looking, not at her son, but at me. "You had better make the most of this last morning; it is still too damp for Nesta and me to venture out."

"Oh, I shall not think of going out," Nesta said, colouring violently.

Mr. Carr came a step further into the room, and addressed her, speaking low. "Perhaps, in the afternoon, when it is warmer, and your sister has brought back a good report of the day, you will let us persuade you to come out."

Nesta looked up to make a slight dissenting gesture, and Lady Helen, out of all patience, spoke sharply to me. "If you mean to go, Janet, you had better set off at once. I know what walking to the shore means, and I have no pleasure in being kept waiting an hour and a half for luncheon."

It was pleasant to get out of doors; the air was fresh and cool after the rain, but full of sunshine. We crossed the garden almost in silence, but as soon as we had entered the wood, and were safe from inquisitive eyes and ears, Mr. Carr

turned to me with a smile which displeased me, as being too confident. "Well?"

"Well!" I answered, drily.

"Ah! I see there is a preliminary question. Is it peace?"

"What do you mean?"

"Between you and me, is it peace—peace or war? Are we to be friends?"

He held out his hand; I put mine behind me. "I am not prepared to make any bargain yet," I said; "I will not take sides."

He looked down at me with that lazy, graceful, considering air of his, which always gave me the impression of want of earnestness.

"Ah," he said, "you look very formidable, but you don't alarm me in the least. I know you too well; there is not a hard spot in your heart. You can't turn against us, I defy you; no, I am not the least afraid. I was not afraid that you would prejudice your sister against me even last night, though it was rather hard to hear the murmur of your voices—her voice, low as it is, I could distinguish it in my room—and to know that my fate was being discussed, and not be able to put in a word. You will relent, and tell me something—something about her. Tell me that she did not cry last night. I thought her eyelids were swollen this morning, and I could have killed myself."

"You ought to be very angry with yourself," I answered; "you have put her in a very painful position. You know Lady Helen will be displeased when she hears what you have done, and that it is painful to us to conceal such a thing from her. You ought not to have spoken to Nesta."

"If I had cared less for her, perhaps I should have thought of all these punctilios, and asked her at a better time; but, you see, I care so much, that when a chance of knowing her mind came, I could not resist it."

"I beg your pardon," I said. "If you had cared for her more, you would have been more considerate. It is not a punctilio that the person you ask to be your wife should require your mother's approval—at least, her consent—before you expect her to promise you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "My dear Miss Scott, that sounds very well, but we are facing facts. You know my mother. I don't wish to say a word against her; but, knowing

all you know, do you seriously advise me to take the wife who would have her approval, and lose every hope of happiness or worthiness for my whole life, by selling myself to gratify her ambition?"

"I am not advising you. I have nothing to do with your conduct, except so far as it concerns Nesta. What we are discussing now, is the impropriety of your asking her while she is a guest in your mother's house."

"Ah, so I thought! Come, confess that, put into plain words, it does reduce itself into a question of time and circumstances—of the fitness of which I hold that true feeling is the best arbiter."

"I can't argue with you," I answered, losing patience, "but I do think it was very unkind. Nesta has incurred the anger of one hostess by refusing an offer; it is really too bad that she should be exposed to the danger of displeasing another by accepting one." Angry as I was, I could not help smiling, as I finished my sentence: the dilemma it depicted sounded so absurd.

Mr. Carr laughed outright. "Thank you, thank you," he cried. "I said you were not formidable, that you meant to tell me, and you have told me all I want to know. Your sister has refused Moorsom, and fears to displease my mother by accepting me. Thank you. Nay, you shall not take my thanks so coldly. I will not hear such news without being congratulated. You must shake hands."

I shook my head without speaking, between vexation at my own admission and real unhappiness, I was so troubled, that my voice failed, and the tears sprang to my eyes.

Mr. Carr was grave in an instant, and when he next spoke it was in a gentle, pleading voice.

"Shall I be such a very unwelcome brother to you?" he said,—“cannot you try to reconcile yourself to me? I don't think I am altogether so very bad; I cannot be, or your sister would not tolerate me. Will you not trust her instinct? I do. I could put her good opinion against the misconstructions of the whole world, I am so sure *she can* only like what is worth liking."

"My approbation is not the question," I answered. "You seem to forget our father and mother."

"No, I don't; but since you are here, I want to gain yours first. You are nearest to Nesta's heart, and therefore, next to

her good opinion, I shall always hold yours—I must have it—I mean to have it; for the rest, I flatter myself I have already won your sweet mother's liking, and your father I hope to satisfy when the right time comes. My conduct will bear looking into; and if he takes exception at some of my opinions—at some of my writings, I must answer, that I was his pupil; that he and his training have helped, with the other influences round me, to make me what I am. He cannot—he dare not—stand between me and the only chance of happiness that has ever come to me. I wish you would tell me what your objections are—what faults you accuse me of.”

“There would be no use in my doing that,” I answered, half crying, half laughing; “for if I do, you will talk about them till you make them all look like virtues.”

“Ah! I see how it is. You and I are too much alike ever to think very highly of each other. Being equally fond of dissecting endlessly our own thoughts and emotions, we distrust each other because we are always distrusting ourselves. Such people as you and I turn naturally to seek rest in characters like Nesta. Their single-mindedness gives us a sort of standing-ground. We bow before their faith, so much wiser than our reason, and see the light, pure and clear, through their eyes, which to us could only come broken into a thousand colours. What Nesta has been to you ought to make you understand, in a degree, what she and I might be to each other.”

I put aside the flattery which insinuated that I stood on the same level as himself, and spoke out my thoughts unsparingly.

“Do you think it would satisfy any woman to have a husband who wanted her faith for a standing-ground, and the truth of her feelings to make him sure about his own? I should expect my husband to guide me, and teach me how to think and feel.”

“Of course *you* would; but Nesta's wants and yours are not the same. If she chooses me, may I not conclude that I am what she wants?—that, without my vagaries and restlessness, and doubts and sorrows, I could never have called out the depth of divine compassion and tenderness in her nature, which must be called out before her whole heart can be given.”

“She has not said yet that she has chosen you.”

He smiled. "No ; but did I not put it doubtfully enough ? I will say 'if, if' as often as you like. You cannot unsay the sentence that slipped out just now, and you must not expect me to forget it."

"Well," I answered, "if I am to be held so strictly to my words, we will speak on indifferent topics, where you will not be tempted to twist them into more meaning than they were meant to have."

"As you please. I am ready now to talk about anything. Shall we discuss the origin of evil, or free-will, or the last new novel ? Any of these subjects will do equally well for what we want. With our minds full of a totally different thought, it will be good mental exercise."

"We can be silent," I said.

So we were for a minute, and then I burst out, "You asked me to tell you some of your faults. You have reminded me just now of the one I dislike most—that half-sneering way of talking you fall into sometimes, as if you were not quite sure whether anything were of consequence—whether all feeling might not be pretence. I am sure I am not like you in the disposition that prompts you to this kind of speech."

"Say experience, instead of disposition, and you will be right," Mr. Carr answered. "It would be strange indeed if you, who have never been in the battle, should have put on the armour. Perhaps, if your life had been like mine—a constant struggle to keep a safe belief in goodness and nobleness—to keep natural feeling from being stung to death by constant arrows of sarcasm—you would not have allowed your inner self to appear so openly ; you would have adopted some sort of case-armour."

"You ought to call it disguise, not armour, and disguise is only fit for weak people. Ought any grown-up man or woman to be so afraid of having their feelings wounded, or their opinions shaken, that they dare only express them veiled in half sneers ?"

He coloured. "No, certainly not. You are right. Well, in excuse for myself, I will confide to you a discovery I have just made. I never *have* been grown up till now. I begin to think that no man is full grown till he thoroughly loves—till he has found the woman he can love with his whole heart and approve with his whole mind. If he never finds her, he never grows up in this world."

"Then you mean now to cure yourself of sneering," I said.

"I don't mean to cure myself, I mean Nesta to cure me. When you and I are walking down to this shore together some ten years hence, we shall perhaps be commenting on the success of her work. You will have to acknowledge that there is not even the capacity for a sneer left in me."

"Now we must be silent again," I cried. "You have worked the conversation round to the forbidden topic, and I have no answer to make."

It fared so with every topic started. Nesta's name was brought in somehow; and during the rest of the morning our conversation was broken by long intervals of silence, when we each followed our own thoughts undisturbed. I remember vividly what mine were. How I wondered whether I should ever again walk across those marshlands, or gather shells on the low, flat Broadlands beach! If ever, how I should feel when I did so, and what would have happened in the interval—wondering over the possibilities of the future in the fearless way which is only possible while we are strangers to pain; and the very recollection of which brings pain, when the future over which we wondered has changed into our past.

I gathered some shells on the shore for myself and Nesta, to make treasures of, little thinking how the sight of them would sting us one day.

When I got back to the house, I was glad to find that Charlie had already arrived there. He had received the note I sent to him the day before, and had hastened back to Broadlands, burning with curiosity to know the reasons which determined us to return home so suddenly.

I had never relied much on Charlie's judgment, but I found it a relief to disburden my mind of all the occurrences of the last week even to him.

Our conference occupied pleasantly my last afternoon at Broadlands, while Nesta and Lady Helen were taking a drive.

Charlie was as incredulous as brothers always are when they hear of their sisters' conquests. It required very particular statements to convince him that it was not all my fancy, and when I was provoked to enter into details a little too sentimental for repetition, he received them with shouts

of laughter. Even when I succeeded in persuading him to be serious, I found him little inclined to take a bright view of Nesta's prospects. He was more sure than I had been, that our father would never give his consent to an engagement between her and Shafto Carr. In support of his opinion, he repeated some strong words my father had once addressed to him on the subject of unequal marriages—words, he said, which he should never forget.

"What made him say that to you?" I asked, curiously. "Did he suspect that you were in love with any one?"

A blush passed over Charlie's handsome boyish face. "Well, if you must know, he did. Some fool or other—I wish I knew who—had put some such crotchet into his head."

"But who was the lady he was warning you against?"

"Now, Janet, don't look as if you would drag the name out of me with your eyes. How awfully curious you girls are! It was—some one you hardly know."

"Rosamond Lester!" I cried. "Charlie, do you know, I guessed long ago that you cared for her."

"And do you know that you guessed completely wrong? I do not, never did, and never could care a straw for her. It seems to be a prevalent delusion, that everybody is in love with Miss Lester."

"But you used to look very conscious when she was mentioned."

"Conscious! I should think so, when I had had first my father, and then Hilary thundering at me about her till I was tired to death of the sound of her name. The truth is, that when I was staying at Morfa I did try to get up a bit of a flirtation with Miss Lester, just out of opposition, to spite Hilary, and to frighten my father, who really has no business to get such ridiculous notions into his head at his age. It was no use, however. She is quite too gloomy and grand—much more in Hilary's style than mine. I should as soon think of falling in love with the Jung-frau."

"Do you mean that you think Hilary loves her?"

"He's an awful hypocrite if he does, that's all. How I should like to prove it against him! But no, no! Hilary will never be in love with any one. He never would go up to the hall, he preferred standing shivering by the hour on a mountain-side, watching his shepherds digging lambs out of

the snow. He thought it a grievance that I declined to shiver with him."

"So, after all our suspicions, neither Mr. Carr, nor you, nor any one else was in love with Rosamond?"

"I think it was no business of yours to have suspicions at all on such a subject."

"Well, we will talk about our own concerns again," I said; and we discussed possible changes in the family, and speculated about the future, till the last purple tint of sunset faded from the marshlands, and the autumn twilight falling round us warned us that it was time to return to the house.

Nesta kept close to Lady Helen all the evening, venturing now and then on showing her timid marks of affection. She was not repulsed. Lady Helen endured her soft words and shy caresses with a sort of pitying tolerance, as if she saw in her a victim of whose fate she had a melancholy prescience. We were to start early in the morning. I had resolved to have some conversation with Lady Helen, when we went up stairs at night, but I found it impossible to carry out my intention. She held the door of her room, to which I followed her, while I made my farewell speech.

"Good night, my dear, good night; you have nothing to thank me for. Your visit has ended most disastrously for yourselves. I know quite well what has happened; it is a sad mistake, but you must allow I did my best to prevent it. I am as much disgusted with Shafto's folly and selfishness as your father will be. Don't worry yourself; I exonerate you from blame, and only think poor Nesta as silly as girls of her age generally are. We must hope that some extraordinary turn of good luck will yet undo the mischief. Now, good night, and good-bye, my dear."

I was thankful for Lady Helen's permission not to worry myself; it saved me from many useless scruples. The next morning Mr. Carr accompanied us to the station, and during the long drive, while Charlie was on the box of the carriage, and he sitting opposite Nesta and me inside, there was opportunity for much talk about his plans and feelings. I was not sure that it was well for Nesta to hear it, but I could not prevent her listening. He insisted on having her directions respecting the course of conduct she wished him to follow. "Should he write to our father at once, or wait and come to London as soon as our father returned home?" He *said* he

was ready to do whatever Nesta and I thought right, but he showed a very strong determination to make us think it right that he should come to London. I was in favour of the letter being written at once to our father, and I think Nesta would have shared my opinion if Mr. Carr had not been sitting opposite, urging his view of the case with all manner of eloquent pleading. "A personal interview would be so very preferable," he said. "If our father's answer were a refusal to permit his visit to us in London, he should be obliged to obey him; and yet he felt that he must plead his cause in person, and above all, he must see Nesta again, whatever happened."

For a long time Nesta sat with her eyes fixed on a bouquet of monthly roses, which Mr. Carr had gathered for her from the porch before we started, hardly ever looking up or speaking, but permitting me to answer for her. But, as we drew near to the end of our journey she gained courage, and when I expressed my opinion too strongly, put in some palliating word, which Mr. Carr never failed to make the most of. Not, however, till the carriage stopped at the railway-station, and Charlie was in the act of getting down to open the door, was her final verdict given. "She wished to do what was most right," she said, "but, perhaps—yes—she understood; she could not ask him to write that difficult letter to our father. She had rather he did as he wished about it; she should like him to come to London"—(the last words were almost a whisper).

Was there any occasion to shake hands over it? It was too soon to wish good-bye, for we had to walk down the hill to the station, yet Mr. Carr put out his hand, and she gave him hers; and I could not but feel what that silent hand-clasp implied. Nesta did not mean to promise herself away without our father's and mother's advice—but had she not done it?

We had not time for long leave-takings. When we reached the station the train was just starting. Charlie ran about distractedly after our luggage. We took our seats, the shrill whistle sounded, and we started on our road home. Was it really only a month since I had left it?

CHAPTER XXI.

“ ‘Does the road wind up-hill all the way!’

‘Yes, to the very end.’

‘Will the day’s journey take the whole long day!’

‘From morn till night, my friend.’”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

HOME again! Once more we four brothers and sisters were assembled together under one roof. What busy talking days were those five which followed our return home, and preceded our father’s! I began to think I had assumed my ideal character of family-adviser, I was so much in request during that time for private conferences.

On the evening after our arrival, Nesta had hidden her face on our mother’s shoulder, and told her own story in her own fashion, and my mother had been moved to give fuller sympathy than after-reflection permitted her to think justifiable. After a night’s consideration, she determined that it would not be right in her to encourage Nesta to think of Mr. Carr till our father knew of his offer; and, since Hilary ruled that nothing must be told to our father that could tempt him to hasten his return, she took the course of advising Nesta not to think about him for the present, and consoled herself by drawing me into corners twenty times a day to ask me in confidence what I thought Nesta was thinking about.

My mother’s surprise when she heard the history of our visit was very unlike Charlie’s. That Nesta should have been admired and valued seemed to her a matter of course. She would not have wondered if we had had to tell of twenty offers instead of two, but it plainly disturbed and perplexed her not a little to discover that Nesta had (as she mildly expressed it) thought of any one. That fact she could hardly bear to realize to herself. She confessed that it was a blow to her to resign so soon the heart that had been all hers; so soon to see her youngest, whom she had always shielded from trouble, burdened with the “cares of life.” Nesta little knew what these cares were, or she would not be in such a hurry to take them up, my mother assured me, sighing, many times every day.

These conferences with my mother were usually cut short

by Hilary's hunting me up, and insisting on my going out with him for a walk. He took great exception to our custom of staying in the house the greater part of every day. How we could exist without air, and how we could endure to spend our days cooped up between four walls, was a perpetual marvel to him. To our indifference to fresh air he was disposed to attribute every one of our family maladies, mental and bodily, from my father's failing eyesight, to Charlie's extravagant college expenses, and Nesta's infatuation in fancying herself in love with such a fellow as Shafto Carr.

My first conversation with Hilary convinced me that he was in no mood of mind to sympathize with love troubles. He used to set his face into a peculiarly hard, stony look, when I tried to enlist his sympathy on Nesta's behalf. I did not know what I was talking about, he would say; he had given me credit for more sense. Nesta engaged to Lady Helen Carr's son! We must all be out of our minds. I need not talk to him about love; perhaps he knew more about it than I did—perhaps he did not. One thing he did know—that no good could come of loving, or fancying that one loved, a person in a different position of life from one's own. One might shut one's eyes for a time and fancy that all was well, but the pain and self-humiliation would surely come in the end. The only thing to be done in such a case, was to crush out the foolish presumptuous love at once. It was to be done, and he had no patience at all with people who made a fuss about it, or troubled their friends by bemoaning the pain it cost them.

In some such strain as this would Hilary talk to me for half an hour at a time, and when I answered that I thought he was exaggerating the difficulties, for that there was after all no great disparity between Nesta's position and Mr. Carr's, he used to turn sharp round upon me, and look for a moment as bewildered as if I had broken in upon his train of thought by introducing a totally irrelevant subject. When I ventured to remark on this pre-occupation, and begged him to tell me what he was really thinking about, and to take me into his confidence, I was accused of being fanciful, and asked angrily what business in the world I had to suppose that he had any particular meaning in what he said, or any confidence to give. After this we usually finished our walk in silence.

On the whole, I did not at that time find as much comfort

in discussing the perplexed state of our home affairs with Hilary as I had hoped to do. Some trouble of his own hid other people's from him. He was too proud or too prudent to let us help him, and so, for the time, he lost the power of helping us. But I must be just to Hilary. We had one conference which I liked to remember when he had gone. I am not sure that I ought to call it a family conference, for neither Hilary nor I were the chief speakers in it. It occurred on the evening after my father and Mr. Armstrong returned to London. My father and Charlie went out after tea to attend the first history lecture, and Mr. Armstrong remained behind in our dining-room with Hilary, who was to return to Morfa the next day. I had intended to leave them alone together, but as I was going out of the room Mr. Armstrong called me back, to say that he wished, while Hilary was still with us, to repeat a conversation he had had with Dr. Allison about our father's health. A stranger might have thought it odd, that a person not a member of the family should know as much of our affairs and take as deep an interest in them as Mr. Armstrong did. To any one who knew his character it was not strange. I remember his telling me that he seldom walked from our house to his chambers without being stopped by a poor child, with a request that he would knock at a door to which his petitioner was too small to reach, or explain a direction, or assist in an anxious search for a missing half-penny. The children were right in selecting him from all the crowds of passers, as the subject of their appeal; there was "helper" written on his very face. If each person were to take some word to express what he was—that word would belong to him. While we were all talking together, it occurred to me to wonder why, after profiting for so many years by this helpfulness of his, I should only now be beginning to appreciate it. I supposed it might be because Mr. Armstrong's services were always rendered so much as a matter of course, and so often persisted in with playful determination in spite of remonstrance, that I had come to consider them rather as proofs of his love of having his own way, than as marks of kindness to us.

After that evening I began to understand how very much we all owed to him. The news he gave about our father was not cheering. Dr. Allison did not, indeed, despair of arresting the complaint from which our father was suffering, but

the precautions he insisted on were just those which we feared our father would be least likely to observe. He was ordered to avoid exposure to cold or great light, and to use his eyes as little as possible. How to save him from transgressing these rules many times every day, we four set ourselves to discover. After carefully considering the work he had to do in the school, Mr. Armstrong and I made some fresh arrangements, by which we could so prepare each day's business as to spare his eyes in some degree ; but when we had done our utmost, we were obliged to confess to each other that there was little hope of his ever being cured, unless he could lead a very different kind of life from his present one. Mr. Armstrong told us that our father had spoken to him about his own plans for the future. He was determined not to give up the school at present, for he hoped to be able to struggle on at his post till Charlie had left college. The trustees of the school had promised to appoint Charlie as my father's successor in the head-mastership, if he took a sufficiently high degree to warrant their doing so—and my father, having great faith in Charlie's ability, looked forward hopefully to the day when his favourite son would relieve him from the work which his growing infirmity rendered burdensome.

Hilary began to walk up and down the room while Mr. Armstrong told us this plan of our father's. After two or three silent turns he gave us his thoughts upon it.

"In less than two years Charlie will take his degree, and step at once into this important post—he will be in a position to provide for the whole family."

"He will do for us precisely what our father did for his father and mother," I said. "It is right he should have some one now to do it for him."

"Right ! I should think so—what a lucky fellow Charlie is, to be able to do it ! If I keep myself, it is about all I shall do for the next five years. I shall be of no use to them, and I am the eldest son. Charlie is a lucky fellow."

"Will he think himself lucky ?" Mr. Armstrong asked, turning to me.

"He will be willing," I answered. "His vanity may make him think he is sacrificing himself, but he will not disappoint our father."

"I don't doubt his good feeling, but I fear the certainty that he is condemned to a profession he dislikes will damp

his energy now. He will have no heart to work well—he will be idle. I wish his next two years were safely over.”

“So do I.”

“Well,” Hilary burst in, “if Charlie is not satisfied to do such work as our father has done all his life—if he does not think it honour enough to be the bread-winner of the whole family, all I can say is, more shame for him !”

“Would *you* have been satisfied with such a life ?” I asked.

“Janet !” Hilary’s eyes flashed upon me ; he took a quick turn up and down the room. When he spoke there was remorsefulness mixed with the gravity of his tones. “Janet, if when I had the choice of my way of life before me, I could have hoped ever to do for our father what Charlie has the chance of doing, I should not have hesitated for a moment. Much as I hate a studious life, I would have made myself take to it.”

“Very well for you to say that,” Mr. Armstrong answered. “You have the power, not only to do work you dislike, but to take a kind of savage pleasure in making yourself do it. Charlie is not like you. It will be very hard to him to resign himself to the prospect of being tied down to an occupation he hates. His sense of duty will, I hope, carry him through ; but I wish the struggle had come a year or two later, when he was a little more prepared to meet it.”

“Do you think it would be better not to tell him just now ?” I asked. “Could you explain your fears to our father ?”

“No, I don’t think I could ; it would be an interference on my part ; and, besides, I should not like to suggest fears to your father which would give him such very great pain.”

“Do you think I ought ?” I asked, a little fearfully.

Mr. Armstrong smiled, and answered my question with another. “Come, now, do I deserve that ? Am I such a coward, that I should be likely to put off a task upon you because I think it too painful for myself ?”

“But you might have thought I was the proper person to speak.”

“I don’t think we are either of us called on to advise your father. Perhaps he knows Charlie better than we do.”

Our conversation flagged after this. Hilary walked up and down the room in silence, and I fell into a train of rather

melancholy musing. I did not know I was looking dismal, for I did my best to keep the tears from coming into my eyes ; but, I suppose, the expression of my face betrayed my thoughts to some kind eyes that were watching me.

Mr. Armstrong's voice roused me from my reverie. "You are tired and dispirited to-night, no wonder," he said, cheerfully ; "but you will feel differently to-morrow."

"How do you know that ?" I asked.

"Because to-morrow the school meets, and you will have your hands full of work. I know your courage will rise to meet it. Hilary has been envying Charlie for the part he is to take by-and-by. Do you know I think something might be said about the part you are taking now, and have taken for the last two years ; something, or a great deal, only I suppose it belongs to women to do the hardest part of the work without anybody noticing that they do it, or thanking them ; they expect that sort of thing, and prefer it, don't they ?"

I suppose some foolish self-pitying thought of the kind had been poisoning my mind with its bitterness, for it was wonderful how these few pleasant words seemed to set me right with myself and every one. After hearing them I could look up, and say, frankly,

"No, no ; my work gets plenty of thanks—more than it deserves ; or, if not, never mind."

"Never mind ! that's right. Work done with a view to appreciation and thanks is poor work, whether done by man or woman. You will want better standing-ground to bear you up under all you will have to do for the next year or so."

"No work for papa will be difficult or hard to me."

"It can be difficult without being hard. Let us see how we can plan it. Your father says you are never again to try *your* eyes by writing at night ; so all your new work must be got into the coming short days, or left."

"Left ?"

"Yes, for me to do."

"No, indeed ; you do far too much for us already. You shall never have a scrap of my work. I am ashamed to think of all the trouble I have hitherto let you have." A slight trembling in my voice warned me to stop abruptly.

Mr. Armstrong took out his watch. "Now, how long do you think you and I ought to quarrel over this question ? You know our disputes always end in my having my ~~own~~

way. Suppose you satisfy your conscience by thinking your objections for a quarter of an hour, and then we will resume the conversation on the supposition that I have had the best of the argument. Do you see what o'clock it is ?”

“Yes ; too late for us to waste a quarter of an hour. I had rather talk over the work, and satisfy you that I can get it all into my day.”

I did my best, and strove hard to lengthen out the hours, and insisted upon my capacity for correcting exercises, reading themes, and working problems in incredibly short spaces of time ; but with all I could say I had to yield on more points than one. When everything was arranged, I was almost ashamed to find how very little that was difficult or tedious there was left for me to do.

As I was mounting the stairs to rejoin my mother and Nesta, after Mr. Armstrong had left us, I could not help thinking what a much more valuable possession a friend was than a lover. I had lately seen two very sensible men act the latter character, and I considered that they had contrived to make themselves as embarrassing and troublesome as possible to the person they most wished to please. What a different effect friendship had on people's behaviour to each other. How thoughtful, how wise, how kind a friend might be ! Was I not fortunate in possessing one ? Nesta lifted up her wistful eyes to me when I entered the drawing-room. What had I heard, she asked, to make me look so bright ? Had I good news for her ? Could Charlie have had a letter from Broadlands ? I was ashamed of myself when I found I had no reason whatever to give for my happy looks.

Poor Nesta ! those busy days were a hard trial to her : then first her eyes took the wistful look, and her face the expression of patient waiting that grew so habitual to it in after years. Our father's return, and Dr. Allison's opinion about his health, had given a new direction to every one's thoughts. Our mother, especially, was much pre-occupied with this fresh care, and could not but believe that Nesta, like herself, would give every other a second place in her mind. She begged Nesta to say nothing about our Broadlands visit that could disturb our father, till he was thoroughly rested from his journey, and till the pain of parting from Hilary was well over. So Nesta had to take her first lesson in waiting.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ And slowly was my mother brought
To yield consent to my desire ;
She wished me happy, but she thought
I might have looked a little higher.”

TENNYSON.

OUR mother's extra caution defeated its own purpose. As usually happens in such cases, the news for which our father was to be judiciously prepared came to light in the most unpropitious manner, and at the worst possible time. It was on the day when Hilary and Charlie left us. We breakfasted early, for the sake of the travellers, and after breakfast our father and Charlie retired to the den to have some private talk together. They were absent longer than we expected. Hilary grew fidgetty, and observed, many times, that Charlie would certainly miss his train. When they emerged from the study at last, Charlie came out with a somewhat crest-fallen countenance, and my father looked depressed and agitated, as he too often did after a private talk with Charlie. Both wished to have a few minutes longer together, during which some kind words might have been said to remove the painful impression of parting under a cloud. Unluckily, Hilary's fear of being late gave an air of bustle and confusion to our farewells. My mother felt and lamented it, but my father was so unhinged in consequence, that I saw he could hardly listen patiently to my mother's endless conjectures whether they would be in time for the train, and to her complaints that Hilary should have forgotten his packet of sandwiches after all.

I was glad when Mr. Armstrong arrived, to walk with my father to the school. As they were leaving the room, the servant entered with the morning letters, and my father turned back to look at them. He could no longer read writing, but he generally knew, by the outside look and feel of a letter, whether it came from any one of his accustomed correspondents. He held up these close to his eyes one by one, and, pronouncing that they were all for him, and probably about school business, said he would put them into his pocket, and make Mr. Wilton read them to him in the course of the day. One letter fell to the ground ; Nesta stooped to

pick it up, and on glancing at the direction hesitated a moment before giving it back to him.

He held out his hand for it. "Don't keep me waiting, Nesta; I am late already."

Still Nesta hesitated, and when our father at last took the letter from her and put it into his pocket, her eyes followed it wistfully.

"What was there about that letter, Nesta?" I asked, seeing her still look disturbed when my father and Mr. Armstrong had left the room.

"Oh, I wish I had had courage to keep it back," she said. "It might be only fancy, but I thought the handwriting looked like Mr. Carr's. If it should be a letter from him to papa, and papa should give it to Mr. Wilton to read, Janet, how dreadful it would be!"

I tried to laugh at her fears, and during the day spent several half-hours at different times in combating them; but my arguments did not set Nesta's mind at ease, and, towards evening, I began to share her anxiety. I knew that it would pain our father very much if such news as that letter might contain came to him in a roundabout way; and I wished heartily that we had never made a secret of it. When it began to grow dark, I went to the study and settled myself to correct a pile of exercises there. If our father were angry or troubled, it would be to the den he would betake himself first; and I believed I could save him some hours of painful musing, by being at hand to volunteer the excuses and explanations, he was always so slow to seek. I had left the desk, and was kneeling on the floor looking out a word in the large dictionary when he came in. I had prepared myself for seeing him look angry. I was not prepared for the air of dejection with which he threw himself into his chair, for the weary sigh which seemed to come from the bottom of his heart as he lifted his eyes languidly to the light, now no longer painful to them.

"Papa!" I said, timidly.

"Is that you, Janet?"

I came and sat in my usual place on the arm of his chair. For a moment or two he remained silent, slowly moving the fingers of one hand over the others, a habit he had fallen into since his sight began to fail. Then he drew a letter from his pocket and laid it on the desk.

"Janet, that letter is from Mr. Carr. Do you know—can you guess what he writes to me?"

"Yes," I answered; "but—"

"You know. Janet, I thought I might have trusted you—that you, at least, had confidence in me."

"Papa, you must not be angry with us."

"How can I help it, when I find that you have all combined to keep a secret from me—when I learn first from a letter, which I permit an indifferent person to read to me, that my daughter has engaged herself without my knowledge? It would have been wrong conduct to any father; it is cruel to me, for I am helpless among you all. I can only know henceforth what you please to tell me. If you take advantage of my infirmity to keep secrets from me, Janet, how shall I ever bear it?"

The dejection in his voice went to my heart. I threw my arms round my father's neck, and burst into tears. "Oh, papa, you must not say that," I cried. "You must not put it so. We have been to blame, but it was not want of trust in you. Do not judge us harshly."

He let me say what I liked, and after a time, when I had been able to make my explanations clear, he acknowledged that he had been too hasty. It was not bearing his affliction well, he said, to become suspicious so readily.

When at length we turned to the real subject of discussion, I found that I had gained a sort of advantage from the previous misunderstanding. My father had been imagining our conduct so much worse than it was, that when I told him how Nesta had really acted, he felt relieved. Perhaps my eagerness to save him pain gave a colour to my words, for when I tried to recollect them afterwards, I was surprised to find that I had been making excuses for Mr. Carr, and praising him in order to account for Nesta's liking.

When I had satisfied my father's anxiety, he gave me Mr. Carr's letter to read. It was just such a letter as, considering the line of conduct we had pursued, we might have expected would come. In it Mr. Carr announced his intention of calling on our father the next day, and expressed a rather confident hope that, since the permission Nesta had given him to speak to her father had not been recalled, he should find him disposed to receive his petition as kindly as she had already done. My father might well be startled and

pained by having such a letter read aloud by a common acquaintance.

"Did Mr. Wilton read it all?" I asked.

"Yes, all. I would not let him stop. I was so sure there was some mistake, and that another word or two would bring the explanation."

"It is very unfortunate," I said. "The Wiltons are such gossips. The story of this letter will be told to all our mutual acquaintance."

That was but a small annoyance, my father said. The really important point now was to settle this matter in such a way as to promote Nesta's highest happiness and welfare. She was quite a child. Perhaps the best thing for her would be to put it out of her head once for all. Was I sure this could not be done? I was so *very* sure, that my father stopped my protestations at last.

"Ah! well, my dear, that will do. Of course, of course. You are young and are only seeing the beginning of these feelings. You have never seen an end. You don't know how they may be lived through. Poor little Nesta! I would not be hard upon her. I suppose she thinks herself grown up, and capable of choosing. Her lover writes as if he were a hundred. I can only think of him as a very clever, forward school-boy, who was always making me hope greater things from him than he ever accomplished. That is, let me see, six—no, eight years ago. He may be very different now. He has written some rather foolish poetry, I fancy. However, I don't profess to understand modern poetry, so I must not judge him from his. You and Charlie think it all very fine, I suppose. Well, I will see him and talk to him, and if he can satisfy me that his principles are sound, and I see reason to think that he is sincerely attached, and if he can bring his mother's approbation—well, then—why, then—we must think about it. Yes, you may go and tell Nesta that *then* I will promise to think about it."

The "ifs" left a very large margin of uncertainty, greater, I feared, than my father had any idea of; but I considered his verdict so far favourable, that I was in haste to report it to my mother and Ernestine.

"May I take Mr. Carr's letter away with me?" I asked.

"Certainly, if you like; it's of no use to me—I can't read it. I shall never have a private letter again, Jenny. No,

don't cry, child, I shall get used to it ; and for the future we will manage better, and not make our family concerns more public than they need be."

I found myself very welcome in the dining-room, where Nesta and my mother were waiting anxiously. My mother left us soon, to seek my father in the study, and then Nesta read Mr. Carr's letter by the flickering light of the street lamps, and holding it tight in her hand, forgot all the troubles of the day, and was content.

During the rest of the evening she was gay—radiantly happy—beautiful ; so that my mother sometimes put down her work, and allowed her eyes to follow her with admiring wonder as she flitted about the room ; and my father roused himself from his habitual reverie to smile—nay, once to laugh, as he had not laughed for months, at her playful words and ways.

The next morning Mr. Carr called, showing his remembrance of an account Nesta had once given him of our hours, by coming in time to catch our father before he left the house. He was taken into the den, and stayed there till school-time. When he left, it was with our father leaning on his arm. He had undertaken to walk with our father to the school-house, in order to prolong the conversation. I am afraid I made Nesta rather angry by remarking that I did not consider Mr. Carr so safe a guide as the one whose place he had that day taken.

After tea, when our father had gone to the lecture, our mother repeated to us the result of his conversation with Mr. Carr. He had been pleased and satisfied on the whole. Mr. Carr had promised not to see Nesta again till his mother had written to signify her approval of his offer, but he had not seemed to feel any doubt that she would do so immediately. A great deal of talk had followed after this preliminary was settled, and my mother had assured us that our father had been pleased with what he had seen of Mr. Carr, better pleased than he had expected. Nesta was made very happy by this assurance, but I could not help having a vague misgiving. I feared I knew quite well what sort of conversation it had been, and how, without intending it, Mr. Carr had given a false impression of his opinions and state of mind to our father—how they had gone on using the same phrases, without knowing that each attached somewhat different meanings to them.

Two days later, Lady Helen's letter arrived, and again I felt oppressed with a conviction that I understood its meaning and the feelings under which it had been written better than my father and mother did. I had to read it aloud to my father, and then it was passed round the table for my mother and Nesta to look at. What a vivid colour burned on Nesta's cheek, and how wistful her eyes grew while my mother turned the sheets backwards and forwards, and re-read sentences that puzzled her, and my father sat back in his chair, with slightly contracted brows, thinking: At length he drew Nesta towards him; he touched her burning cheek with his finger, and passed his hand over her face. She was trembling so, she was obliged to kneel down by his side; and she looked up at him as if it were a sentence of life or death she was expecting.

"My child, why do you agitate yourself so?" he asked, gently. "Cannot you trust me to judge what is best for your happiness in this matter?"

A less truthful person than Nesta would perhaps have answered "Yes." She could not give such an answer, for she knew there was little trust in her heart just then, only one wild wish, which to make room for itself, had thrust every other thought aside.

She was silent for an instant, and then whispered, "Papa, are not you satisfied with the letter?" He sighed and shook his head—he understood the silence and the question.

"I suppose I ought to be satisfied," he said; "it is a consent. I could have wished it had been given in fewer words, and that there had been less said about the wisdom of keeping secret an engagement that is not likely soon to end in marriage. Still it is a consent, and that was all I exacted. Nesta, my child, listen to me: if your heart is really given to this man, I will not let any pride of mine stand in the way of your happiness. But listen to me. Be very sure that you love him and that he loves you, before you consent to become one of a family that has some excuse for looking down upon you. How could you, who have always been the cherished one among us, bear to live among people who would look coldly upon you?"

"I hope they would not for long," Nesta answered; "and even if they did, I *could* bear it if it did not alter him—if he went on loving me."

"Ah, if!—but, Nesta, I ought to warn you. Pride is often stronger than love. What look very like small differences at first, may be widened till they put those who thought themselves united very far apart. It is not well when one of the two feels that he or she has given up the most. It is apt to wake a feeling of bitterness in both hearts. One estimates too highly the advantages sacrificed, the other can never forgive itself for not having had enough to give."

My father spoke with an effort, and there was a sort of bitterness in his tone. Nesta looked up at him wonderingly.

"Papa," she said; "you cannot think this more unequal than I do. You cannot be more surprised than I am—but he *has* chosen me, and there can never be any bitterness for me in that. I shall only have to be grateful, and I shall be grateful enough."

"I think Nesta is right," my mother said, speaking for the first time, and with some hesitation. "I do not think what your father has said need make her afraid. When people really love each other, they do not look upon little seeming differences as he fancies they do. A young girl—a foolish young girl—might talk too much about a very bright happy home she had left, and seem to be making comparisons, but it would only be seeming, there would never have been any grudging in her heart. There cannot be where people really love. I don't want to influence any one, but I should not like your father to let that fear weigh with him, for I think there he has always been a little mistaken."

Nesta turned quickly round and caught my mother's hand. "Oh, mamma, you understand; speak for me," she said.

"There is no need," my father answered. "I see what your wishes are, and, as I said before, I will not let my own pride withstand them. God bless you, my child!" He put his hand solemnly on her head, and then my mother took her into her arms and kissed her, and when my turn came and Nesta put up her face to mine, I felt as if some great change had passed over her, and that it was no longer my own Nesta, but some one else's, whose tearful cheek I kissed.

Before my father left for the school, I wrote at his dictation to tell Mr. Carr that he might come to our house that evening.

I was busy with the exercises all day, and saw little of

Nesta till we went up stairs before tea to change our dresses for the evening. She was very particular about what I was to wear, and would dress me first with her own hands, as if it signified most how I looked. Her own dress was soon chosen—it was one Mr. Carr had once admired at Broadlands; but her fingers trembled very much when she put up her hair—it would not go right; then I tried to arrange it for her, but my performance was pronounced to be dreadful—it must all come down again. She had to gather up her hair hastily at last and twist it under her comb, for my father's knock came sooner than we expected, and it would not do to keep him waiting for tea. As she crossed the hall I stopped her, and stood before her to take one hasty look, to smooth the silken braids on her forehead, and leave a kiss between them. The last arrangements, hasty as they were, had been most happy. She looked prettier than I had ever seen her before—more than pretty—beautiful. There was a radiance about her eyes and face and figure that gave a new character to them. It was as if some drooping flower had raised its head, and was drinking in life and colour from the light. Mr. Carr opened the dining-room door for us. It was so strange to see him in our room, I did not wonder that the only greetings between us were silent shakes of the hand; or that the conversation during tea was subject to many pauses. After tea, my mother, Mr. Carr, and Nesta went up stairs, and my father and I adjourned to the den. I was glad all my work was done, for my father had a great deal to say to me. He was divided between a certain misgiving concerning the wisdom of the step taken that day, and a liking for his old pupil which his two short interviews with him had revived.

He recurred with pleasure to Mr. Carr's old school triumphs. "And he has not forgotten his scholarship," my father said, complacently. "Just as you came in this evening, he was telling me that when, during his travels in the East, he visited the Troad, he thought over our old Homer readings. He thinks that the old poet's descriptions of scenery have so thoroughly entered into my mind that I know the place almost as well as if I had seen it. He was surprised, he said, to find how familiar the features of the country were to him, and he attributes his knowledge to the pains I used to take to make him realize the descriptions in

the poem when he was reading them.—Ah ! you are laughing, Jenny ; you think your father a pedantic old fool, as easily flattered in his way, as his little daughter has been in hers, eh ?”

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ Alas ! how easily things go wrong !

* * * * *

And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.”

G. MACDONALD.

Yes, it was settled. Nesta was Mr. Carr's promised wife ; and Hilary and Charlie being gone, we had to settle down into the usual routine of our daily life, with the strange difference which the knowledge of that fact brought into all our thoughts and feelings. My hands were full of business during the months that followed, and I found that my work prospered best when I took myself and it to the den, where I was always secure from interruption. The dining and drawing-rooms were subject to invasions from Mr. Carr, who used to come to our house at all hours of the day, and waste Nesta's time and his own to an extent which sometimes moved my mother to a gentle remonstrance. The great basket of needlework, which had always been considered Nesta's special charge, no longer changed its contents with the rapidity of old times. Mr. Carr made a show of bringing his work to our house, and really, I believe, sometimes passed an hour or two in writing, but the same hours were not equally serviceable to Nesta. He liked her to be in the room while he was composing, and he liked her to be silent ; but Nesta had, I found, to content herself with sitting in the window and being looked at occasionally. She must not sew—the sound of the needle was disagreeable to him, and he thought the quick motion of the fingers ungraceful ; he had rather she did anything but sew, while, with the over-full work-basket on her conscience, sewing was the one thing she longed to do.

I do not suppose, however, that Nesta had any great objection to have her time thus wasted. I should have heard very little about it, I fancy, if other subjects of dis-

quietude had not arisen as time went on. I don't know when she first descried the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which floated up into her "wide heaven of blue," but she was very reluctant to let us know the quarter from which it rose; unwilling to confess, even to herself, that a possibility of disagreement between herself and her lover had opened itself out before her. By degrees we all discovered that Mr. Carr was more alive to the difference between our position in life and his own than we had expected he would be. Duties and employments which were quite simple to us offended and shocked his taste.

He had been used to rail against conventionalities, and to express strong admiration of the men and women who had courage to set them aside; yet, when it came to practice, he could not reconcile himself to such a little thing as Nesta's habit of going out alone in the morning to execute our mother's commissions at various shops in our neighbourhood. He made an effort at one time to accompany her in her daily rounds, but the tax on his patience and punctuality grew quite unendurable. He never could come at the right time; my mother's household arrangements would not permit her messenger to delay; Nesta constantly had to set out alone, and to meet on her return her lover's face with a shade of displeasure on it. When Mr. Carr did come in time to walk with Nesta, the shopping seldom prospered; the minute care in selection necessary to satisfy our mother, amazed and wearied him beyond expression. He could not conceal his dislike to her employment; Nesta had to return home leaving half her business undone; and I do not know whether she dreaded his coming or his not coming the most.

Before long another little cloud floated up to obscure Nesta's sunshine. My father and Shafto had agreed perfectly well at first. When my father returned from the lecture, or came up stairs with me from the study, he used at one time to enjoy half an hour's talk with Shafto. When little disagreements in opinion arose—when my father showed surprise at anything Mr. Carr advanced, or took exception to one of his favourite phrases—Shafto was willing at first to let the subject drop with some qualifying explanation, or at worst with a slight shrug, when Nesta was not near enough to keep the disdainful shoulders in their place by putting her hands upon them.

I do not know how the first argument arose, or how Nesta and I could be so much off our guard as to let it be carried on, till one subject after another was embraced by it, and a vast gulf of difference of opinion discovered between the two who had fancied themselves, at least to some extent, in accord. I believe Nesta did her best to turn the conversation, but my father and Shafto were both far too fond of an argument to be easily stopped when once fairly embarked in one. I remember how pale Nesta grew as the talk went on, and how my father's tone, at first a little dictatorial, changed to one of grave remonstrance. Mr. Carr did not know the harm he was doing; when he rose to take leave, he said he thought we had had a very profitable evening. It was a good thing to turn one's thoughts over. He did not, for his part, profess to have fixed opinions; he preferred to be without them, but he always liked to hear other people explain and defend theirs.

My father was not so easily satisfied. When he and I were next alone together, he blamed himself bitterly for the hasty way in which he had consented to Nesta's engagement, without making himself sufficiently acquainted with the character and principles of her suitor. He could make allowances for Shafto Carr, he admitted to me, he had no wish to judge him. If he had regarded him merely as an over-confident young man, expressing crude opinions, which further acquaintance with the real sorrow and work of the world would probably modify, he could have heard him with indulgence, and hope that he would grow wiser and humbler as years went on. Looking upon him as the person to whom he had promised to confide the care of Nesta's life, it was a very different matter—a matter for grave thought, for earnest consideration. He would not take another hasty resolution; he would watch and wait.

Knowing how carefully he was watching, my anxiety and Nesta's whenever he and Mr. Carr fell into conversation afterwards may be imagined. It was very weak of us; we ought not to have wished to keep our father in ignorance of Mr. Carr's mind. We never confessed to each other or ourselves that we did; but by a sort of instinct, we were always pushing away every serious topic when they two conversed together. The result of our interference was that a freezing constraint fell upon us, the instant our father entered the

room, and that the comfort and freedom of our evenings were over for ever.

The beginning of March brought Lady Helen Carr to London, and with her another dark cloud into our sky—or rather, she acted the part of wind, and marshalled the scattered clouds into formidable battalions against us. How dark and heavy everything used to look after one of her visits!—though, perhaps, she had been all kindness to each one of us while she stayed. It was singular, certainly, that faculty she had, of dropping a heavy burden upon one's heart with one smiling gracious word. How many cold March days I remember, when Nesta used to creep about the house, looking like a spring flower withered by the east wind, and how surely I soon learned to expect that drooping, troubled look on her face as a sequel to a note or visit from her future mother-in-law.

Yet on our first interview with Lady Helen, my father and mother were satisfied with the manner in which she referred to her son's engagement with Nesta. She did not profess to be pleased, but she was careful to speak as if Nesta were the person whose interests had been sacrificed. She did not, she said, consider a long engagement a bad thing for a young man; on the contrary, she felt she owed a debt of gratitude to the parents who showed such confidence in her son's good faith as to permit their daughter to waste the best years of her life in waiting till he was ready to claim her. It was a lucky thing for Shafto that Nesta's father and mother were so unwilling to part with her, that the prospect of her marriage being deferred almost indefinitely did not trouble them.

My father and mother found nothing to object to in these sentiments the first, or indeed the second time they heard them; but when the same thing came to be said over and over again, and when nothing else ever was said, we all agreed in finding it somewhat depressing.

Mr. Carr and Nesta had been accustomed to map out a very different future for themselves. It had been arranged early in the year, that Mr. Carr was to leave England in the spring. His uncle, Lord Denbigh (Lady Helen's brother), had been appointed ambassador to Constantinople, and he had offered to take Mr. Carr with him, in the capacity of private secretary, a post for which his knowledge of Eastern language, and experience in Eastern travel, peculiarly fitted him.

Till Lady Helen came to London, Mr. Carr and Nesta, in talking over this prospect, had always seemed to take it for granted that they were to be married some time in the course of that year. Mr. Carr was to accompany his uncle to Constantinople in May, but he was to return for Nesta as soon as he had prepared some sort of a home for her. It would be in the autumn, perhaps late in the autumn, Nesta thought.

When Nesta repeated to me attractive descriptions which Shafto had given her of the kind of life she would share with him in that strange land, she only scrupled to rejoice over her prospects because she thought it would be almost wrong to be so very happy without all of us. I used to reconcile her to her happiness by planning impossibly delightful summer and winter holidays, when we were to visit her in her Eastern palace, and, perhaps, under Mr. Carr's guidance, fulfil my father's early dream of travel in Scripture lands.

After such brilliant visions it was no wonder that Lady Helen's doubtful words fell very coldly on our ears. It frightened Nesta to hear herself pitied for her approaching long separation from her lover, and praised for having so readily consented to his banishment. Lady Helen *would* take it for granted that it was Nesta who had persuaded Shafto to accept his uncle's appointment, and *would* compliment her on the prudence she had displayed in so doing. After all, she would say, six or even eight years soon pass, and Nesta need not be afraid that they would alter her *very* much. She was so much prettier than most people, that, like Helen of Troy, she might set the lapse of years at defiance. Ten years hence she would still be charming. No wonder she had confidence in herself.

In this strain Lady Helen would descant, for half an hour at a time, while Nesta and I were sitting with her in the boudoir of her dreary London house, never noticing how Nesta's sorrowful dejected face appealed against her words.

Silence and downcast looks were all the appeals we could make. If Mr. Carr had not courage to avow his purpose to his mother, it was not for us to do so. I grew very indignant about his silence as time went on. At length the long-deferred explanation came. One rainy April day, Mr. Carr called late and remained for more than two hours, talking in the dining-room with Nesta. Nesta came up from the inter-

view with a very sad face. As soon as we were alone together she told me that Shafto had had a most unsatisfactory conversation with his mother. He had at last informed her of his intention of being married during the autumn. She had made no objection at first ; she had professed the greatest affection for Nesta, and declared that she had now no other wish than to see her son made happy in the way he had chosen ; but while they were amicably discussing Shafto's plans for the future, she overwhelmed him by raising a wholly unlooked-for difficulty. It was not till after some further explanation that Nesta and I understood this difficulty. We had hitherto thought, and Mr. Carr had appeared himself to think, that, though far from rich, he had a small independent income. It now appeared that there had been some misunderstanding on this point. The Broadlands estate had very much decreased in value since the late Mr. Carr's death. The yearly income now derived from it did not exceed the sum which Lady Helen's husband had assigned for her use during her lifetime. Of late years, while she had lived chiefly with the Lesters, Lady Helen had received a portion only of the money due to her, leaving what remained for her son ; and he, indolent and unused to investigate his affairs, had grown so accustomed to the arrangement that he had learned to consider the few hundreds a year this afforded him as justly his own. It came like a thunder-clap upon him when Lady Helen made his project of immediate marriage an excuse for hinting gently that she could no longer continue an indulgence, which, under present circumstances, would involve herself in serious difficulties. She could not now, she told her son, spend the greater part of every year with the Lesters ; she had resolved to give up her wandering habits, and settle in some suitable home of her own ; and to do this she must claim the full income which her husband's will decreed should always be made up to her. Against this Mr. Carr could of course say nothing. Lady Helen was but claiming a right, which she had hitherto given up for his convenience.

Poor Nesta ! the spring opened sadly for her, and I do not think we pitied her quite enough. I had dreaded her leaving England, till the certainty that she was not to go came almost like a reprieve. My mother was even a little surprised and hurt that Nesta should grieve so bitterly because she was *not* to leave us all. Had it really come to that—that she was

sorry to stay at home with her father and mother? Nesta had to assure her many times every day that she was not grieving because she had to remain, only that he must go.

The thought of parting came slowly to the lovers; they would not allow themselves to see that it was inevitable at first. Mr. Carr came every day for a fortnight with some fresh scheme, which Nesta was to hear and decide upon. Now he would decline the secretaryship, stay in London and read for the bar; now he did not see any reason why they should not marry at once upon the income he should receive from his uncle. True, he had no habits of economy, and he had been used to spend twice as much on himself alone; but with Nesta he was to begin a new life.

Nesta was kept from day to day in a state of feverish excitement, with always that terrible pain laid upon her, of appearing to decide. In reality she had no power of determining anything. I always knew how every plan would end. I saw that a far cleverer head than hers was bringing every circumstance to work towards a desired end. Mr. Carr, with all his talents, and in spite of an occasional burst of impetuous self-will, was precisely the sort of person to allow the course of his life to be settled for him by the pressure of circumstances, or the contrivance of others. He never saw how things were tending till it was too late to alter them. Nesta's far more practical mind was for the time overruled. Lady Helen worked upon her generosity by representing that the sacrifice of her own wishes was necessary to her lover's future good. When Mr. Carr talked of staying in London, or marrying before he left England, Lady Helen drew Nesta aside, and whispered fears about Shafto's health. He, like herself, had never been strong; care and anxiety destroyed him. She was sure he would never be able to bear the anxiety which a hasty, imprudent marriage must bring with it. Her own experience, the acute sufferings which mental struggles had brought on herself, made her fearful.

All Nesta's reasonableness could not defend her from being touched and troubled by this fear, and she was too humble to say or think that she could bring strength and help to her husband, which might repay him for some sacrifices. Neither did Mr. Carr say that for her. I fancy Lady Helen had secret conferences with him too, and that she dwelt on my father's distrust of his steadfastness, and on my mother's reluctance

to part with Nesta, till his pride was roused, and his affection wounded.

He told me that he saw we none of us trusted him, and that he dare not ask Nesta to accept a lot which all her friends dreaded for her. If she chose it freely, it would be well ; but he would not urge it upon her.

It was the devotedness of Nesta's love which gave her strength to pronounce the verdict at last. She would let him go, she decided, since it was for his good ; and alone, since it was thought possible that she might be a hindrance to him. She had rather wait, and suffer alone for years, than cloud his life for a moment.

So Nesta explained to me her reasons for deciding as she did. I don't know how far she was able to make them clear to Mr. Carr, or whether it was her reserve or his pride which prevented them from understanding each other perfectly. I saw, however, that in spite of all he had said about leaving her free to choose, her decision came upon him with a shock of surprise and disappointment. He had expected her to find it impossible to part with him, and the discovery that she was more reasonable than he had thought it in her nature to be, actually pained him. He did not remonstrate—an open remonstrance would, perhaps, have changed all—but he could not keep himself from dropping now and then a remark on Nesta's prudence ; sometimes it was a half-sneering compliment ; sometimes a tender reproach, but always so veiled, that Nesta could only shake her head sorrowfully, and remain silent under it.

When it was once settled that Mr. Carr was to go to Constantinople alone, every one but Nesta seemed to wish his last weeks away. My father and mother congratulated themselves at the end of every day, as if they really thought that when Mr. Carr had once sailed, the disturbing element would pass out of our lives, and Nesta would again be content and cheerful as she had been a year ago.

She said little, less and less as the dreaded time drew nearer. Each day in passing, made her a little paler, quieter, more silent. It was her nature to fade and shrink into herself under sorrow. She had no great demonstration to make. Grief set a seal on her lips, and on her heart ; only in joy could her nature expand, and show itself.

I don't think Mr. Carr quite understood her silence and

quiet. They oppressed him. He came and went, haunting our house during those last days like an unquiet ghost, appearing and disappearing unexpectedly, at all hours, as if he were always seeking something he could not find, and always going away dissatisfied.

Often I used to see him sit watching her, while she, with her eyes fixed on the ground, and her once busy hands drooping idly in her lap, remained for a long time together, pondering in silence ; and when at last she lifted up her face, and the result of her deep thought proved to be some contrivance for his comfort during the voyage, or a plan for obviating some trifling inconvenience she thought it possible he might be exposed to, a shade of disappointment used to pass over his face ; his lip used to curl, not exactly with disdain, but with a kind of wondering pity, as if he had said, " You are as much occupied with trifles as other women, then."

At length the last day arrived, and with it a sort of calm, such as often comes to help people through long-dreaded days. Mr. Carr came to our house early, and did not leave us till five o'clock, when he had to start by train to Southampton. Lady Helen joined him in the afternoon ; my mother pitying her from her heart, for having to share with us the last hours of her son's company.

How could she have borne it, if Hilary had been leaving England, and had chosen to spend any part of his last day away from her ?

She and Nesta thought they could not show enough sympathy and kindness to Lady Helen that day. They measured her sorrow by their own capacity for suffering. Lady Helen was really thankful to them for giving her credit for more feeling than she would have ventured to claim for herself. During that one afternoon, she accepted Nesta as her daughter, and professed to have no desire left but for her son's safe return, and that in the future, she and he might be more to each other than they had ever yet been. Nesta, she said, should teach her to know her son's heart.

I don't think she was acting a part when she said this ; I believe she was really living in a character which for the hour pleased her. People who have the art of deceiving themselves are by far the most dangerous deceivers of others. Lady Helen really felt what she said, while she sat in our little room, with Nesta's and Shafto's hands clasped in hers, and

her son carried away with him a belief in her kindness and good faith, which gave her after words more weight than they would otherwise have had.

My mother and I took care to leave the three most concerned in the parting alone for the last two hours. We sat at our work in the dining-room, my mother wiping her eyes now and then, and talking to me about Hilary's wish to emigrate, and her earnest hope that I would do all I could to turn him from such a dreadful purpose. At last Mr. Carr came in to us, very pale and quiet, to shake hands and wish us good-bye. He stayed with us a minute only; then the silence of the house was broken by the shutting of the front door, and we heard a cry upstairs which made us both run to the drawing-room. It was Lady Helen, not Nesta, who had cried out. She was in a fit of hysterics, and Nesta, with a pale, tearless face, and trembling too much to stand, was sitting on the arm of her chair, supporting her.

Lady Helen occupied Nesta and my mother all the evening. They made untiring efforts to calm and soothe her, and to find remedies for the really terrible fit of neuralgic pain which over-excitement brought on.

It was not till Lady Helen had gone home, and Nesta and I were alone in our room together, that Nesta's self-command gave way. Then it seemed as if the silent, heavy tears would never cease to flow. If they had not been so very quiet I should have minded them less. I should have hoped they might bring relief, but they fell slowly and heavily, one by one, as if they came from a source too deep ever to be wept away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"When some beloved voice, that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new;
What hope? what help? what music will undo
That silence to your sense?"

E. B. BROWNING.

My father and mother were disappointed in their expectation. Nesta did not grow happy, nor return to her old calm routine

of duty as soon as the excitement of Mr. Carr's departure had passed away. When a page is turned in the book of life it is not so easy to turn it back again. Nesta could not do it, though she tried very hard. She used to sit in her accustomed place, with her work-basket before her, but the work was no longer done ; her hands would fall in her lap twenty times in an hour, and her eyes might have been looking over the mosques and towers of Constantinople for any service they were put to in our room. My mother complained sadly of this constant absence of mind. Why (she would ask me) could not Nesta be as happy at home as she used to be ? It was very strange. There was nothing she and her father would not do for Nesta, no indulgence they would not grant. It was hard, after all their care, to find themselves of so little consequence to the child they had best loved ! My mother did not wish to be hard on Nesta, she said, but she could not help being pained by her lack of interest in home concerns. She had not made a single remark about the new dining-room carpet, and she constantly put Hilary's letters aside without reading them.

My father found in Nesta's continued dejection a reason to blame himself for past neglect. If he had cultivated her mind properly, he believed she would have had remedies at hand against sorrow. It was all I could do to dissuade him from beginning a course of mathematical study with her at once.

Lady Helen recommended constant change of scene as a more likely expedient, and that Nesta might have a chance of trying her remedy, she took her away from us every now and then for a day or two, and carried her about to balls and parties.

For a time Lady Helen's efforts seemed to have more success in rousing Nesta than any of ours. Nesta's excitement when a visit to Lady Helen was in prospect, and her utter weariness and dejection when she returned home, were some excuse for my father's constantly-expressed fears, that she was being changed into a discontented lover of pleasure.

I read her heart better, and understood how single her purpose was in seeking Lady Helen's company. I knew she was always hoping that Lady Helen would say some kind word, or let fall some cordially-expressed anticipation for the future, which would have been like manna to her hungry heart;

and her weariness, on her return, was caused by disappointment that no encouraging words had been spoken. It pains me even now to recollect how Nesta's eyes used to wait on Lady Helen's lips, how she used to start with pleasure when the opening words of a sentence sounded promising, and shrink into herself again when some double meaning in the seeming kind words was revealed at last. Lady Helen must have had some real power about her, to inspire us all, as she did, with so strong a belief that her will was fate, and her reading of the future the true one which time must bring. Even Mr. Carr's letters to Nesta when they began to arrive, did not free her, as I had hoped they would, from her bondage to Lady Helen. Lady Helen received letters from him too, and she generally contrived to give Nesta some piece of information from them, which in part undid the consolation she had drawn from her own. How I dreaded hearing Lady Helen offer to read extracts from one of her son's letters when we came to call on her! Nesta never could summon resolution to refuse to hear, though she soon came to know as well as I did that she would surely hear something that would send her away less happy than she had come. Nesta used generally to have her own letter in her pocket, as a sort of safeguard, all the while; but I have known her take it out when we got home again, and put it away for a day or two, after hearing Lady Helen's.

I do not believe there was, after all, much in Shafto's letters to his mother that need have troubled us. It was Lady Helen's comments that put such painful meaning into them. She used to make every cheerful word in a letter a text to dilate upon.

"You see how happy he is" (she would say), "how his whole heart is given to his work. If he *had* taken any foolish step, which would have thrown obstacles in the way of his advancement, how he would be regretting it now! After all, in a clever man ambition is by far the most absorbing passion. You and I were right about that, my dear Nesta."

Lady Helen would give Nesta's hand a congratulatory squeeze as she said such words as these, and look as if she really thought it would please her to hear them. Sometimes she used even to kiss her, and promise, in emphatic tones, that she would not fail to tell Shafto how reasonable Nesta

had become, and how well she understood his letters. They say a person can be killed by constant pin-pricks. If mental wounds were as fatal as bodily, I think Nesta would have died of those which Lady Helen inflicted during one of those dreary mornings we spent with her in her comfortless London house.

Once or twice during this spring, on returning from entertainments to which Lady Helen had taken her, Nesta mentioned that she had met Mr. and Miss Moorsom. They were paying a visit of some weeks to an aunt of their mother's who lived in London, and who chanced to have some acquaintance in common with Lady Helen. I was curious enough to question Nesta very strictly respecting their behaviour to her. At the first meeting, Nesta said, Miss Moorsom was stiff and cold, and Mr. Moorsom embarrassed; but when she and they had been thrown together once or twice in crowded rooms, where they knew no one but each other, they were driven into sociability. Nesta thought both brother and sister grew more friendly and kind every time she saw them; and she confessed that she could not help being pleased when, among a crowd of strange faces, she recognised two that recalled past happy times to her. She acknowledged that she found a ball or a concert less wearisome than usual when her Deepdale friends happened to be near her.

Lady Helen never mentioned these meetings with the Moorsoms to me, and her silence awoke an uncomfortable suspicion in my mind. I wondered within myself how large a part of Lady Helen's letters to Constantinople were filled with descriptions of those same balls and concerts, and of Nesta's enjoyment of them.

I had to work very hard during the last two months of the summer school-term, for Mr. Armstrong was not able to give me as much help as formerly. He was absent for a fortnight on a visit to his father, who had fallen into a bad state of health; and when he returned to London, his time and thoughts were occupied with some pressing cares, the full extent of which we, at that time, hardly knew. He who had so much sympathy to give his friends in their anxieties, talked very little about his own. The few times when he did speak of the troubles that were darkening his home, I chanced to be the person whose sympathy he claimed, and I

could not help being glad that it was so. Just then it seemed to me that I was the one most at leisure to think of other people's sorrows. Even my father was too busy to seek Mr. Armstrong's confidence as he would certainly once have done. He used to ask me, sometimes, if I could guess why George had looked so grave all the evening. Such contented ignorance rather surprised me. I considered that the troubles of so old a friend ought to have been made a subject of constant thought; and, to make up for the shortcomings of the rest of the family, I secretly occupied myself a good deal in thinking over them, and in grieving that we should have so little power of helping one who was always helping us. I doubt whether Mr. Armstrong would have approved of the form my sympathy took, for my work suffered in consequence of my bringing a pre-occupied mind to it. I had to sit up late at night to finish tasks over which I had been dreaming, and next morning I got up feeling still weary, and struggled through the day with a wretched consciousness that I had not time to do anything thoroughly, and with a dread hanging over me that I should break down utterly in the end. My mother and Nesta grew anxious about me, and some one (they both declared that they were not the culprits) wrote such an alarming report of my looks to Hilary, that he sent a pressing invitation to me to come and spend a month with him at Morfa Bach as soon as the beginning of the school holidays set me free.

The idea of leaving home was not as pleasant to me as it would have been a year ago. My father and mother were, however, anxious that I should have change of air, and my mother combated the scruples I raised about leaving her and Nesta, by telling me that she had not been quite satisfied, for some time past, with Hilary's letters. She feared he was out of spirits, and it would really be a comfort to her if I would go and cheer him.

A visit to Morfa had been the day-dream of my childhood. Now that it had become a possibility, I had to reason myself into enjoying it. I remember I was quite melancholy over the last day's school-work. It happened to be a very busy day, for there was an immense pile of examination papers to be looked over, and my father wished to have my opinion about them before I left home. I shut myself up in the study, but I don't think I should have finished the

work in time, if Mr. Armstrong (busy though he happened to be) had not contrived to spare a few hours in the course of the evening to help me. I had almost forgotten how to work energetically ; it was really quite a treat to see how rapidly the pile of finished papers grew under his hands.

The last exercise was laid aside a full half-hour before my father came back from the lecture, and we had time for some talk, which, somehow or other, had the effect of sending me from home in braver spirits than I had lately known. Mr. Armstrong began by congratulating me on having successfully helped my father through another half-year's work. Our plan had, he said, answered better than he had expected, and he gave the credit to my diligence—my courage, he called it. I had not been feeling very courageous lately, so, to turn the conversation, I ventured to ask some questions about his family, which led to his telling me more about his own life—about the difficulties he had had to struggle through, and the unhappy uncongenial home in which he had been brought up, than I had ever yet heard—than he had ever hitherto confided to any one, I remember he assured me. When he had finished, I said I thought it rather hard that he should have had so much care all his life, that even his youth should have been so troubled. But he would not let me tempt him to grumble. He could not call his life hard he said, for there had been one great blessing in it that more than outweighed all the cares. Some day he promised he would tell me what the blessing was ; meanwhile, he wished me to know how often little things he had heard in our house had given him fresh courage when he was disposed to be down-hearted. Did I remember telling him one day the Norse story of the Rainbow Bridge and the River Clouds, Kormpt and Ermpt. I should be surprised, he said, if I knew how often it had helped him to get through a difficult piece of work to call it Kormpt and Ermpt. I had forgotten the story, and Mr. Armstrong told it me over again very nearly, he said, in the words I had used three years ago. They sounded more like my words than his, but I could hardly believe they had dwelt in his mind so long.—“Once upon a time, Odin, accompanied by all his sons and daughters, set out to seek the fountain of Urd. They travelled over the entire world till they reached that highest point of the heavenly hills where the Rainbow Bridge touches the earth. Across this

bridge lies the road to the Urda Fountain, whose life-giving waters confer immortality on those who taste them. The portal of the bridge is guarded by the sleepless Van Heimdale, who can see for a hundred miles round, and hear the grass grow and the wool on sheeps' backs. When Odin and his children approached, he opened the gate and permitted them to pass through, one by one; the youngest first, then the next youngest, till it came to the turn of Ving Thor, Odin's eldest son; but when he was about to place his huge foot on the tremulous bridge, Heimdale held him back. 'Great Thor,' he said, courteously but firmly, 'Bifrost is not for you; you do not need the support of its jewelled pavement to enable you to wade through the abyss, and therefore it is not permitted to you to pass over it, you are too strong.' The brow of Ving Thor grew dark as a thunder-cloud. 'Am I the only one of Odin's sons who is forbidden to taste the water of immortality?' he asked. 'Not so,' answered Heimdale. 'See you not those dark river-clouds, Kormpt and Ermp, which also lie across the sky, and lead to the Urda fountain? Through them, if you will be advised by me, you will take your way.' For a moment Thor hung back. The river clouds were dark and cold, the bridge glittering and beautiful. Why must he take the least pleasant road to the fountain, just because he was the strongest? He had half a mind to go back and give up his share of the water of life, rather than have it on such unequal terms. Odin seeing his hesitation, thus addressed him:—'Son Thor, why do you linger? Kormpt and Ermp lie before you, as Bifrost before us, and what can it matter if you reach the fountain of Urd over Bifrost or through the cloud?' At these words Thor turned his back on the many-coloured bridge and plunged at once waist-deep into the cloud. Firm resting-place for his feet lay under it. The sky was blue over his head. The arms of Ygdrasil were around him. Breasting the cold river, he urged on his way, rejoicing in his strength, and was the first of all the Æsir to taste the immortal water."

"Just because he was strong," I said, musingly, when Mr. Armstrong had finished speaking. "That is very well for you, Ving Thor, but for my part, if I might choose, I had rather *not* be so strong, and have the glittering bridge to walk over."

"You see you cannot choose," Mr. Armstrong answered,

smiling rather pitifully down at me. "And what is more, in our real stories, the question is not precisely whether or not we are strong. If Kormpt and Ermtpt lie before us, we dare not doubt but that strength will be given us to make our way through them to the fountain of Urd. I assure you I don't like the look of the river-clouds any better than you do. I rather think that, of the two, you have been the most ready to plunge into them, and are making your way through them most bravely. I hope you are surprised to hear that I can apply fables, and call things by wrong names almost as ingeniously as you can."

I *was* surprised, though not for the reason he suggested. I had, however, no time to protest against the praise he had given me, for my father returned at that moment, and as it was getting late, and I had to start early the next morning, Mr. Armstrong soon afterwards went away.

CHAPTER XXV.

"The bounding in of tides,
The laying bare of sands when they retreat.
The purple flush of calms, the sparkling glee
When waves and sunshine meet."

JEAN INGELow.

THE long summer day was already drawing to a close when Hilary met me at the road-side station, where I had to exchange the railway-train for the slower conveyance that was to take me to Morfa Bach. I had been sustaining my spirits during my solitary journey with the prospect of receiving a very hearty welcome from Hilary at its end. I found, however, that I must be satisfied just at first to take his delight for granted. Hilary was far too business-like, and far too conscious of being known by every one at the little Tan-y-Bryn station, to give me any other greeting than a sharp inquiry as to what luggage I had, and a warning that the train did not stop five minutes. I had mounted the curious-looking open vehicle in which I was to conclude my journey, and we had left the paved road of the straggling village behind us, before I had a good look at Hilary's face then he turned round to adjust a shawl round my knees. Our eyes met, and I was quite happy

"Well, Janet." A volume of affectionate welcomes could not have conveyed more than those two words in that satisfied voice of Hilary's. I nestled up to him, and since both his hands were occupied in driving, contented myself with stroking his arm.

"What a great fellow you have grown, Hilary! How well you look!"

"Why should I be ill? It is you who are ill; and no wonder, mewed up in that hole of a house. How's my father?"

"Not so well as I could wish. The last weeks of the half-year always try him dreadfully."

"Ah!" Here the horse got a smart touch with the whip, which made him change his already quick pace to a gallop, and gave his driver something to do to reduce him to order. When Hilary had leisure to speak again, he resumed his inquiries.

"And my mother and Nesta. Pray do they look as withered up and yellow as you do? I wish Armstrong had written sooner to tell me how ill you are looking."

"Mr. Armstrong! You don't mean that it was he who wrote to you about my being ill. Pray did he say I looked withered up and yellow?"

"What if he did? You need not jump off the seat, need you? If you fall down, there is no one behind us to pick you up. Are we going too fast for you now? Do you like this sort of thing?"

"Like it! Oh, Hilary, it is the most delightful feeling I ever had in my life; only I am afraid it will be over too soon, and I cannot look enough at the scenes that are flying past us—those trees—and oh! that jutting-out, grey rock, with the ivy hanging on it, and those distant mountains—that dark purple one. Shall I see it to-morrow?"

"To be sure you will. Do you suppose it will melt into nothing? It is Pen-Maen-Mawr. No—don't jump up again; it is not safe to stand in a gig, at the pace we are going. Why child, you will see it every day, and all day long, for six weeks to come."

The assurance gave me almost too much happiness. Morning, noon, and night, storm and sunshine, how earnestly I promised myself not to lose any aspect in which that solemn, purple shape, now dark against the evening sky,

might clothe itself for my delight. I sat back, and enjoyed such glimpses of the country as our quick motion and the fading light afforded me.

Now I caught sight of a sloping green hill-side dotted with sheep; now I had a moment's vision of a winding valley between two overshadowing hills. At every turn fresh peaks of distant mountains shot up into our sky—a solemn host gathering round us. I felt as if we were entering an enchanted land, and dreaded to wake, and find myself dreaming. Hilary found time, every now and then, to point out such objects as he thought worthy of my notice.

"There, Janet; those two oddly-shaped hills leaning towards each other are called the Rifels; and now, just here—no, we are too late to-night; but just here, on a fine day, you can see the two peaks of Snowdon."

"The Rifels. Then it is somewhere about here that Merlin is buried," I cried.

"Is it?" said matter-of-fact Hilary. "Well—only don't throw yourself out of the carriage, that's all."

Another half-hour's delightful silence, during which the grey twilight had given place to the cold silver shining of a crescent moon; and Hilary stopped at a turn in the road.

"Do you see those lights on the opposite hill-side?" he said.

"Yes; what are they?"

"The Great House is there; those are the lights from the windows."

"Morfa Mawr? Oh! Hilary, you must let me stand up, and see it better. Just remember all our old talks when we were children. How little we thought that you and I should ever be looking at it together!"

"On the contrary, if I remember right, we thought too much about seeing it. Sit down now; the house won't have vanished before morning; and, Janet, one thing I must warn you against, don't be always referring to our old dreams about Morfa here. It is Mr. Lester's Morfa, remember, not ours."

We had now turned our back upon the lights, and were slowly winding up a steep road.

"Where are we going?" I asked; "I don't see a sign of a house now."

"Morfa Bach lies on the other side of the hill. We are

close to it now. This gate opens into the fir plantation that shelters the farm-house."

Plantation! I called it a wood; and I looked up at the dark heads of the trees, and down through long isles of sombre trunks, silvered here and there by the moonlight, with a delicious shiver of awe. "What is that sound, Hilary, a waterfall?"

"Yes; a mountain rivulet runs through this wood, and tumbles over a piece of rock into a stream at the bottom of our garden. It spoilt one of the best meadows of the farm, till I had the waste water drained away."

"A waterfall close to your house! Why, what a paradise it must be, Hilary!"

"H'm! don't expect too much—and, Janet, I may as well prepare you—we are close to the yard-gate now." Here Hilary looked cautiously round, as if he feared to be overheard, and lowered his voice. Mrs. Morgan, you know who she is—the old lady who used to keep house for poor Williams, and now does the same for me."

"Well, what of her?"

"Why, you see, she does not take to your coming as kindly as I could wish. She *will* have it that I sent for you because I am not satisfied with her management. Ever since she heard I expected you, she has been pestering me to look over her books, and talking about her honesty, and her misfortunes, and her being a widow, and I don't know what all. I am afraid you won't find things very comfortable just at first, but I've no doubt you will be able to talk her round. I shall leave the old lady to you, and keep out of the way altogether."

"Oh you coward!" I cried, laughing. "Big and formidable as you look, you are in bondage to old Mrs. Morgan."

"There!" exclaimed Hilary, "how incautious you are, calling out her name quite loud! Did you not see the yard-boy standing at the gate? He must have heard what you said, and he is Mrs. Morgan's cousin's grandson."

"How could I guess that he was Mrs. Morgan's cousin's grandson?"

"I may as well tell you then, once for all, that everybody here is related to everybody else, and that every word you say about any one is sure to be repeated before the day is over."

We had now stopped before the door of a low, long house,

whose white sides and overhanging roof I could just distinguish in the moonlight. Hilary lifted me from the carriage, and I soon found myself in a large, comfortable-looking farm-house kitchen, where Mrs. Morgan was waiting to receive us ; no formidable-looking virago, as I had begun to picture her, but a small, pale, doleful personage, who put her apron up to her eyes when she heard that I had been travelling for eight hours without having had anything to eat.

When I had paid my respects to her to the best of my power, Hilary conducted me to his own part of the house, a wing containing some pleasant rooms. I was in a mood to be charmed with everything that night. How I admired the old-fashioned furniture of the sitting-rooms ! How delicious I found the sloping-roofed garret in which I was to sleep ! How thoroughly happy I was, making tea for Hilary, in an oddly-shaped apartment, all doors and windows, which, from its many sides, I christened the octagon parlour ! What fun it was, seeing Hilary's frightened face, when I had the audacity to find fault with the black toast and cold eggs Mrs. Morgan provided for us, and how I triumphed when I succeeded in preparing an eatable meal myself!—the first, I afterwards discovered, which the octagon parlour had seen for many a day.

Almost as delightful was my waking next morning, when the recollection of where I was, dawned slowly upon me as I watched the golden sunshine pouring through my curtainless window, and filling every corner of my room with dancing light ; bright, clear light, very unlike the intrusive dusty London sunshine, which I had been in the habit of shutting so carefully out of our close rooms.

I did not jump up the instant I awoke, as I had resolved to do overnight, but lay still in a state of passive happiness, listening to the distant sounds of tinkling sheep-bells, and thinking of the description in the "Pilgrim's Progress," of Christian's and Hopeful's arrival in the land of Beulah, where all the cattle wore bells inscribed with "Holiness to the Lord."

Some harsh sounds from below, such as certainly never reached Christian's ears in the land of Beulah, warned me, at last, that it was time to bestir myself.

When I went down stairs, I found all the lower part of the house in a state of direst confusion. Peeping cautiously into the octagon parlour, I perceived that its furniture had been

transferred to the garden, and that two sturdy Welsh maids, with brooms in their hands, were occupied in raising clouds of dust from the carpet and curtains.

Mrs. Morgan met me at the door, with one side of her face tied up in flannel, and a duster in her hand, which she kept feebly flapping about all the time I was speaking to her.

She received my particular inquiries after her health very ungraciously, and when I ventured humbly to express a hope that breakfast would soon be ready, her indignation burst forth.

To be sure, she said, she might have recollected that, being a London-bred lady, I should be disposed to lie a-bed till other people were thinking of getting their dinner. She ought to have calculated on having meals to prepare at all sorts of unreasonable hours, but being far from strong she could not charge herself with more than it was possible for one person to get through. Mr. Scott had breakfasted three hours ago, and was not expected home till six ; and since she understood I had found fault last night with the state of the rooms, and said that my mother would be surprised if she could see them—and such a thing had never been said of her rooms before, and she was a mother herself, and a widowed mother !—The conclusion of her sentence, if it had a conclusion, was lost in the duster, which here served Mrs. Morgan as a handkerchief.

It was very absurd and annoying, but the kitchen door was open, and through the door I had such a vision of a sloping green hill with a wood at the top, and a winding-path, leading to a gate in the wood, that I could not spare a thought to Mrs. Morgan's ill-humour. I told her shortly, that I hoped she would not fatigue herself in cleaning the rooms, which, however, would certainly be better for being dusted, and that I would get my own breakfast ; and then I retreated to the larder, where I helped myself to a cup of fresh milk and a slice of bread.

The rest of the morning and the greater part of the afternoon I spent out of doors, in losing my way and finding it again, and in making all sorts of delightful discoveries about the neighbourhood of Morfa Bach. The afternoon sun was giving a fresh glow to the woods and hills, and paving the sea with a broad road of gold, before it occurred to me that I was doing Hilary no service by neglecting to appease his dragon, and that I ought to return to the house and see

what prospect there was of its being made comfortable for him before he came back tired after his long ride. When I reached the farm-house I found no one within sight or call but Mrs. Morgan's cousin's grandson, Morgan Owen, the yard-boy. From him I learned that Mrs. Morgan had been seized with spasms on discovering that I had entered the larder—that she had gone to bed, and desired him to ride to Tan-y-Bryn to fetch a doctor. It was a way Mrs. Morgan had. He had not been to Tan-y-Bryn, and he did not mean to go, not he. The girls had gone down the mountain ; they would come back when they liked.

Meanwhile the dust had settled again on the carpets and curtains in the sitting-rooms. I found them empty indeed, but neither swept nor garnished ; the tables and chairs still occupied a place on the centre flower-bed in the garden. All my previous fatigue vanished at this sight ; I secured the services of Morgan Owen by promising him sixpence, and with his help set vigorously to work. Two hours later, when the maids sauntered up from gossiping in the village, they were so surprised at the sight of the octagon room, that I thought they never would have done holding up their hands, and exclaiming to each other in Welsh.

I had selected the most available furniture to place in this room, and packed the rest away in the low-ceilinged square sitting-room which looked into the yard. I had arranged some books tidily on the shelves, and put away out of sight various saucers containing samples of wheat and other oddities which had hitherto adorned the chimney-piece. I had also filled the great empty fire-place with young branches of pine-tree, laden with pale brown cones, which I made Owen fetch from the wood. When he returned with his last load, I observed that his face wore an expression of great excitement.

"What is the matter, Owen ?" I asked.

"It's the carriage coming this way through the wood ; I saw it !"

"Whose carriage ?"

"The carriage. They be coming to see you, sure."

"Who do you mean by 'they' ?"

"Why, sure, the ladies from the Great House."

Though I had not been quite twenty-four hours at Morfa, I suppose I was already infected with the prevailing ideas of the place. I certainly should not have been at all agitated

at the prospect of seeing Rosamond Lester in London but in the octagon-room I could not help sharing the perturbation into which her coming threw the whole household ; from Mrs. Morgan, who rushed down stairs in a clean cap, for no object, as far as I could discover, but to make a deep curtsy to her as she passed through the hall, to Morgan Owen, whose curious eyes I could see peering through the open window during the whole of our interview.

It was some comfort to discover that if I was unusually shy before Miss Lester, she was by no means quite at her ease before me. After her first affectionate greeting, her manner, though not exactly timid, was constrained. She began several times to ask questions eagerly, and then she checked herself, as if she feared to show too much interest in us. It might be that my answers were not calculated to promote conversation, for I was more occupied in looking at Rosamond Lester and criticising her appearance, than in listening to what she said. Remembering my conversations about her with Lady Helen, I could not help looking upon her as in some sort Nesta's rival, and I was sorry to be obliged to acknowledge to myself that she was more beautiful than I had previously supposed her to be. It was too proud and striking a beauty to please my eyes, contrasting it as I did with the delicate loveliness of another face ; but I could not find any fault in the features, nor any want of harmony between the dark beauty of her hair and eyes and the exquisite bloom which gave her face its great charm. I wished I could help thinking of Nesta and Lady Helen while I was looking at Rosamond. I felt that it made my manner ungracious, and prevented me from saying a single pleasant or cordial word. I think we should have been reduced to looking at each other in silence if Mrs. Western (Miss Lester's companion) had not been diligent in taking up and reuniting the threads of conversation we let drop. She questioned me minutely about my journey, and assured me more than once that she and Miss Lester had only heard of my arrival at Morfa Bach that afternoon as they were returning from their drive. It was Miss Lester who had insisted on turning round and coming up the hill to see me immediately, though the ponies were tired, and there was a danger of Mr. Lester's being kept waiting for dinner in consequence.

When at last they rose to take leave, Mrs. Western said to Rosamond, "My dear child, did not you come here on purpose to ask Miss Scott to spend a day with us?"

Thus reminded, Rosamond looked straight at me, and said, "When can you come?"

The words sounded abrupt, but I was not offended. I saw there was anxiety in the expression of her eyes; she really wanted me to come. I said something about wishing to know Hilary's engagements before I made any for myself. They knew his habits better than I; perhaps they could tell me when he was least likely to be at home. I looked at Rosamond, but Mrs. Western answered, "I can only tell you that he is always busy. We hardly ever see him now; he has grown very unsociable lately. You must make him turn over a new leaf now you are come. He ought not to neglect his old friends as he does."

"At all events," Miss Lester interrupted, "don't let him infect you with his horror of our frivolous society. You will have many solitary hours which you may bestow on us, your only neighbours. Come to-morrow morning."

"Yes," Mrs. Western urged, "come to-morrow to spend the day with Rosamond and me, but also persuade your brother to dine with us on Sunday. Mr. Lester is tired of asking him, so I determined to try once more. It did Mr. Lester good to have your brother's company, and it was such a help to us! I think he can't know how much more difficult we find it to get over the Sunday evenings now that he has left off spending them at the Hall."

As Mrs. Western finished speaking, Rosamond looked at me and coloured a vivid red on cheek and brow.

"We surprise you," she said. "You can hardly conceive the mental state of people who find it difficult to get over their Sunday evenings."

"Indeed, I was only surprised to hear that Hilary did not always spend his with you. I thought it was an established custom. He shall come next Sunday."

It struck seven while we were crossing the hall, and, emboldened by Mrs. Western's kind face, I asked her if she did not think it strange that Hilary should be so late in returning home. He had ordered dinner at five, and now it was seven. Could any accident have happened to him? It was not like him, I thought, to leave me so long alone.

Rosamond, who had nearly reached the door, turned quickly round, and answered before Mrs. Western had time to speak, "Not like him? Ah! I see I know my cousin Hilary better than you do; it is just like him. He will not think of leaving his business an hour sooner than usual for you or for any one."

Mrs. Western gently interposed. "He is always very busy, and he thinks it right to put business first."

"First and last you will find," Rosamond persisted. "You had better give your time to us, for I assure you it will be thrown away on your brother. He never has a moment or a thought to bestow on idle people."

"His sister will be an exception to the rule," said Mrs. Western, kindly; "you need not be afraid, my dear. Your brother will make time to take care of you. There are poor people and sick people about here who will tell you that they have never known your brother grudge his time to them."

"No," Rosamond added, "for visiting them comes under the head of *business*—my cousin Hilary's word for duty. I hate both words. I am glad I am not a poor person to be visited for duty. I hope when you come to-morrow it will be for pleasure. Now we must go. But don't stand watching at the gate after we leave you; get a book and try to forget that you are expecting any one. Good-bye."

I watched the pretty carriage till it was lost in the wood, and then followed my visitor's advice, and occupied myself for three-quarters of an hour in writing home. At the end of that time I was too restless to sit still longer, and started out to the gate to watch for Hilary. Morgan Owen joined me there, and was just beginning to tell me what a many dangerous roads there were along the coast, and how fond Mr. Scott was of riding by the sands, when I caught sight of Hilary galloping up the winding road which led from the village to the farm-house. At what a pace he rode, and how well he looked on horseback! I was glad I happened to be at the gate to see him come in.

His first words showed me that I must not expect commiseration from him for my solitary day and anxious waiting.

"Well, Jenny," he cried, in a perfectly self-satisfied voice, "how have you been getting on? I have done a good day's work, and come home, as you see, in excellent time. I did not think I could have got through so soon, but I managed

it, to please you. Bless me ! eight o'clock, and you have been waiting three hours for dinner ! Well, try to persuade Mrs. Morgan to let us have it at once, and I will be down stairs in no time."

We had another delightful evening. I would not allow Hilary to sit down to his writing directly after dinner, as he was half-disposed to do, but made him rest in an arm-chair, and listen to an account of my day. I was pleased to find that I could interest him by what I had to tell. Clearly to him, too, as well as to every one else in the house, Miss Lester's visit was an event. I was surprised to find that Hilary was determined to hear every particular connected with it. He cared to know how Rosamond was dressed, and that she was driving the grey ponies, and that it was her own wish to call immediately on hearing of my arrival. I had even to tax my memory to recall the exact words that she had said, and was scolded when I hesitated to supply them. It was not so long ago but that I might remember, Hilary thought.

When he had at last quitted the subject, and been occupied for some time with other things, Hilary brought it up quite suddenly. It was after prayers just as I was wishing him "good-night."

"H'm !" he said, reflectively, "I am glad, after all, that you put the room in order this afternoon. I wonder what she thought of it ? She has never been inside this octagon parlour in her life before. I don't know that I like the new arrangement of the furniture myself, but it shall remain now. Yes, certainly, whatever Mrs. Morgan may say, since she has seen it."

"Who do you mean by 'she' ?" I asked, maliciously—"Mrs. Morgan, or Mrs. Western, or Rosamond Lester ?"

As I pronounced the last words Hilary rushed to the door, which chanced to be open, and shut it violently.

"There," he cried, "everybody in the house knows whom we were talking about. I wish you *would* learn not to shout out people's names, as if you wanted to be heard at the top of the mountain."

"But suppose it is known whom we are talking about; what then ?" I asked.

"Well, well, go to bed, and give me a chance of getting some writing done to-night," said Hilary.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Silence, beautiful voice!
Be still, for you only trouble the mind
With a joy in which I cannot rejoice,
A glory I shall not find."

Maud.

HILARY was much occupied during the rest of the week, and I was obliged to content myself in my solitude by looking forward to Sunday, when I knew I should have his company for the whole day. There was Welsh service at the Morfa Mawr church on my first Sunday morning, so Hilary drove me to another village church about three miles from our farm, and we had a delightful walk home after the service. I had my choice of the inland road or the path by the shore, and I decided on the latter, to the slight discomfiture of Hilary.

"There was nothing to be seen on the shore," he grumbled.

"That is why I choose to walk there to-day," I answered. "I know, by four days' experience, that walking through the fields with you will not be a profitable Sunday employment. You never can keep your thoughts in order, where there are broken fences, and strayed sheep, and patches of corn that want weeding, to catch your eye at every turn. Best put yourself out of the way of temptation."

I spoke in jest, but my words made a serious impression on Hilary, and he walked on for some time in silence.

"I suppose it's true," he said at last, "since you have remarked it too. You, too, find me a dull plodding fellow, without an idea beyond my business. Well, let it be so. What I do, I will do thoroughly, if it is only such matter-of-fact work as you intellectual people despise. No one can say that I over-value myself, or mistake my own position."

"Hilary," I cried, laughing, "if you could but see how proud and savage you look just now, you would not make such loud boasts of your humility. I really cannot keep up such a pace; you must calm yourself and walk more slowly."

"I beg your pardon. You see what a bear I have grown to be. Janet, I believe I did wrong to ask you to stay with me. I have lived with clowns so long that I am no longer fit company for civilized people."

I pondered awhile, and then, knowing with whom I had to deal, I spoke out boldly. "Hilary," I said, "I will tell you the truth ; you are altered. There is something wrong with you, but I am not sure that I know what it is."

"Try to find out and tell me," said Hilary.

"I will tell you one discovery I have made since I came here. I have come to the conclusion that it is not well for people to live under the shadow of a Great House, as you are all doing. I see plainly enough how most of the people about here are affected by what I must call the Morfa Mawr shadow. I should have expected you to lift your head out of it. You don't, and I want to understand why."

Hilary's face darkened. "Do you mean that I have become mean and subservient ?"

"No, no, no! but you are stupidly proud and defiant, and that is almost as bad. You are not simple about yourself ; you see things awry. Why *do* you let these people influence you so ?"

"What people ?"

"Oh, Hilary, you know ; the Morfa Mawr people—the Lesters."

"Do they influence me unduly ? I was not aware of it. I do my duty to Mr. Lester ; but I care neither more nor less about him than I should about any other employer. The other members of his family cannot influence me, for I take good care to keep out of their way."

"Yes, and that is what I complain of," I cried. "Why should you keep out of their way ? You are just as much Rosamond's cousin now as you were when you first came to Morfa. Why have you changed your manner to her ? I know that two or three years ago you and she were almost like brother and sister. You taught her to ride—you encouraged her to visit the poor—you used to consult her about all your plans for them. Why should you treat her like a stranger now, unless she has done something to deserve it ? You ought not to withdraw your friendship from her. No one likes to be deserted without cause by an old friend."

Hilary employed himself in throwing stones into the water for some minutes after I had finished speaking, and he was still turning his face away when he answered, "You exaggerate, Janet ; you call things by wrong names. You have not an idea how absurd your words sound to me. I to blame

for withdrawing my friendship from her indeed ! I desert her ! No, it is too ridiculous ! Desert—what a word ! You don't know what you are talking about."

"I do quite well. I have heard stories from Mrs. Western which show me how intimate you and Rosamond once were. Why have you changed ? How has she offended you ?

"There again you show me how little you understand. *She* could not offend *me*. I take care to keep out of the way of being offended. She is Mr. Lester's daughter, and I am his land-agent. When we were both children, we forgot our relative positions. Now we remember them."

"It is in saying such words as these that you show your pride," I answered ; "and, Hilary, I call it a mean pride. You cannot think for a moment that you are inferior to the Lesters in birth, in education—in anything but wealth. They are richer than we are, that is all. I don't like to see you making so much of that difference. It is a sort of homage to wealth. Are rich people and poor people never to be friends ?"

"Friends !" Hilary repeated. "How fond you are of that word. We are friends, my cousin Rosamond and I—very good friends. We have never quarrelled, and we shake hands when we meet. That's as much friendship as I shall ever pretend to, or accept from her, I can tell you. I've something else to do, luckily for me, than to trouble my head about friendships."

"Hilary, what does make you so determined to shut yourself up in your work ? I wish I knew what was the matter with you. I wish I could help you."

"No, Janet, take my word, it is best left alone."

"There is something, then ?"

"Has not every one some trouble for which work is the best cure ? I have no patience with people who sit with their hands before them grumbling, because they can't have everything their own way."

"There is no fear of your ever doing that, but you may run into another extreme equally bad for you. You seem to me to be working in a restless, feverish way, as if you cared less for the work itself than for not leaving yourself a moment to think of anything else."

"You have quick eyes, Janet ; but don't try to look too far into my mind, or I shall lose patience."

"I wish you could leave Morfa. I see that, for some reason or other, you are not happy here."

"But I can't leave it. Come, I will tell you something of my mind. If I am more restless just now than I used to be, it is because I am bringing myself to bear the thought that I shall probably have to stay here for the rest of my life. A year ago, when Morfa first began to be at times intolerable to me—when I first felt it like a prison—I could promise myself that when another year had passed I would put half the world between myself and the people here. I don't know that I should have had strength of mind to do it, but I felt I had the choice. I could say, if certain things happen, I won't stay to see them. Now it has become so clearly my duty to remain here, that I must not think of escape."

"Why not? What has happened since last year to make you think you ought to stay?"

"Mr. Williams's continued illness alters my prospects here. He has told me that he means to give up the agency. It will be offered to me, and in the present state of my father's health I must not refuse it. I must not leave myself powerless to help you all when he is laid aside."

"Hilary, do you remember one evening last summer, when you were almost jealous because Charlie seemed likely to do more for our father and mother than you? He appears disposed to fail us. You will have to fill his place after all."

"Well, I am not less ready than I thought I should be. If you had any idea what it costs me to take a step which will chain me down here, for the rest of my life, you would know that I do not grudge any sacrifice for them."

I stood still and looked round me—at the smooth sea, rippling in sunny wavelets to the yellow-sanded beach; at the white rocks, and the smooth green sides and wooded summits of the surrounding hills, all bathed in one flood of mid-day glory. "What a lovely place it is!" I could not help saying; and yet you hate it."

"Hate it! Hate it!"

"Nay, don't look at me as if I had said something blasphemous. Did you not talk of being chained down here; did you not call it a prison?"

"What does it matter whether I hate the place or only love it too well? I know I should be better away, and yet

I believe that if I were to leave it, I should always be longing to get back."

"Come," I said, "that is making out too pitiable a case for yourself. Must you be miserable here, and equally miserable everywhere else?"

"Remember that you forced me to grumble. I did not want to begin; you forced me to talk about myself."

"I am glad I did; it is an excellent thing for people like you, to have a good grumble now and then, especially on Sundays. You will feel better for it all the week." I slipped my hand through Hilary's arm, and walked on for a little time in silence. "Hilary," I began again, "I wonder whether the recollection of our old childish talks about Morfa, and of mamma's conviction that it *ought* to belong to you, has any share in making your present position here distasteful."

"No," reflectively. "I don't believe that I am fool enough to be really influenced by such fancies. Yet I think it would have been better for me if I had come here without them. I should have fallen into my proper place at once. My connexion with the old family disguised it from me at first, and it is difficult to fit myself rightly to it now. Perhaps I have made too sudden a change in my manner towards the Morfa Mawr people, as you call them. I am willing to correct anything you think absurd in my behaviour. To begin, I will go up to the Great House with you this evening if you like. I know that's what you've been aiming at all this time."

"But I do not wish you to do anything you dislike very much yourself."

"Did I ever say I disliked going to Morfa Mawr?" Hilary exclaimed. "There is nothing so particularly pleasant, I suppose, in sitting in the octagon parlour listening to Mrs. Morgan droning psalms in the kitchen, that I need grudge spending one Sunday evening differently. Besides, you have set your heart on going, so there's no use saying more about it. Here we are at the foot of the path that leads from the shore to Morfa Bach. It is steep; you will want all your breath for climbing. You can't spring up the hill-sides as Ros—as Miss Lester does."

There was no second English service within reach, and Hilary seemed to find his Sunday afternoon somewhat tedious. I had more than one reminder from him that we must not be later than five in setting out on our walk, and was at last

sent up stairs to get ready a full half-hour too soon. When I had my bonnet on, Hilary thought it impossible to remain longer in the house ; but as he was also very determined not to arrive at Morfa Mawr a minute before the accustomed time, we had to spin out the intermediate hour by walking very slowly through the wood. To calm his restless mood, I made him talk to me about past Sunday evenings spent with the Lesters. It was always safe to lead Hilary to speak of the first years of his life at Morfa. I had discovered that it was almost the only subject of conversation that really interested him. If he could be drawn on to tell stories of his and Rosamond's rides and doings in the early days before she grew up, and Lady Helen began to spoil her, his humour softened, and he became better satisfied with himself and the whole world.

I have not described the Great House, and I do not feel disposed to do so, for I never could succeed in admiring it. The chief impression made upon me by the grand suites of rooms through which Hilary and I were ushered that evening, was, that in none of them would it be possible ever to feel at home. I should have enjoyed walking from room to room, and admiring the beautiful and curious objects with which they were crowded, if I had been alone and might have looked at what I liked, and admired as much or as little as I pleased. As it was, I was wearied by Mrs. Western's reverential manner of introducing me to one costly work of art after another. She *would* be so very sure that I had never seen such beautiful things before, and that she was doing me a kindness by telling me what I ought to think of them. I thought Mr. Lester much altered for the worse since I had last seen him. He looked now a very old broken-down man, and the worn lines in his face had deepened into an expression of habitual discontent. His voice, high-pitched and feeble, had a complaining tone in it even when the words he spoke were meant to be conciliatory. He was laboriously polite to me all the evening ; but when he spoke to his granddaughter or Mrs. Western, the chronic ill-humour, from which he seemed to suffer, betrayed itself, not only in the sharpness of his voice, but in the peevish, fault-finding remarks he addressed to them. Rosamond most frequently provoked his sarcasms. He was always watching her, even when he was conversing with Hilary or me, and I saw clearly that she could not say

or do or look anything, which did not displease him, and jar upon his irritable nerves.

I pitied her with all my heart, till I saw that she was not disposed to trouble herself in the least about her grandfather's ill-humour. Only once during dinner-time did I see the slightest shade of disturbance on her beautiful, proud face. It was when her grandfather peremptorily silenced a remark she seemed anxious to interpose, in a conversation between himself and Hilary, about some vagrants who had lately settled on a piece of waste land belonging to Mr. Lester. She obeyed, after two attempts to speak, but she bit her lip and her eye flashed. Hilary came in for a lightning spark of its indignant fire, though I am sure he did not deserve it, for he showed plainly enough that he was anxious to hear what she had to say. When we left the dining-room, Rosamond offered to show me the grass walk overlooking the sea, which had been my mother's favourite retreat when she was at Morfa.

"I am always glad to spend every moment I can out of doors," she observed, as she led me through the library, where there was a door opening on the west garden.

"I think I should often like to linger here, however," I answered, looking round the spacious room lined from ceiling to floor with books. My father would once have been perfectly happy in such a library as this."

"Then I am sure I wish he had it," said Rosamond, heartily. "It does not make any one of us perfectly happy, I can tell you. I never enter it except to use it as a short cut to the west garden after dinner, when I know that there is no danger of finding my grandfather here."

The library door opened upon a grass-plot, at one end of which was the hazel fence and green gate leading to the terrace-walk my mother had described to us.

"You, too, like this better than the show gardens," Miss Lester said, after we had walked once down the terrace.

"Yes, indeed."

"I am glad you only said, 'Yes, indeed ;' I never like people who go into raptures about scenery."

"But don't you admire this scenery very much yourself?" I asked.

"I don't know. I like being out in the air—I like getting up upon the mountains and looking about me. I don't think

I could live where I could not hear the sea and wind. But I don't want to talk of them ; I hate people who can't be satisfied without saying fine things, as if the mountains wanted *us* to praise them."

I thought of Shafto Carr, and wondered how he and Rosamond managed to converse for half an hour without quarrelling. Rosamond spoke again first.

"You said just now," she observed, abruptly, "that your father would once have been perfectly happy in my grandfather's library. Why *once*—why not now?"

"Don't you know?" I asked. "Have you never heard of our father's affliction?"

"Not all I want to know. Tell me about him—if you do not mind."

I began, and was led on, partly by eager questions from my companion, partly by the look of real interest which softened her face, to speak more fully than I should otherwise have done, of our father's state of health, of our fears for him, and of the kind of life I led when I was at home.

When I had finished, Rosamond uttered an exclamation that surprised me. "How happy you are!" she said.

I had not been thinking so of myself, as I described the employments of my busy days, spent far from every beautiful sight or sound. I had been contrasting my position and hers with a slight feeling of self-pity.

My answer was meant rather as a reminder to myself than for her. "I fancy my father would tell us both, that happiness does not depend on outward circumstances. He says there are hardly any circumstances among which one may not be happy if one tries."

"Then he says what is not true," my companion answered, almost fiercely. "There are some things without which one cannot be happy or good, unless, like the birds in the air or the sheep on the hills, one is satisfied with eating and sleeping, and feeling no bodily pain. I call you happy because you have those essential things—good people about you whom you can love and look up to, and who love you. You are of consequence to some one, and feel yourself of some use in the world. If you were to die you would be missed."

"And you too," I could not help saying. "When you were ill, more people than you know dreaded lest you should die."

"Yes, but not because I was of any real consequence to them. I suppose my grandfather does care for me in his way, but it is a way I cannot bring myself to value. Your mother was good to me just because she is so good. She could not see a lamb dying on the mountain-side without wanting to help it. I thanked her for her goodness with all my heart, but it never made me fancy that I *myself* was of any importance to her. Now that I am well and do not want nursing, she has forgotten me you see."

"No, indeed," I cried, "my mother has not forgotten you; but since my father has been ill, she has had so much to think of, so many troubles."

"And I deserve that she should not tell them to me, for I cannot help her; no one has fewer opportunities of showing kindness than I."

"How differently I have thought of you," I said.

"You have envied me, perhaps."

"I have been used to hear you called a most enviable person—one, whose every want was anticipated, and who had every advantage wealth can give."

"I have the advantage, if you call it one, of making part of the show of this Great House. My grandfather would no more allow me to want anything that he thought a person in my position ought to have, than he would allow his library to want a well-known book, or his drawing-room an appropriate ornament. I am his granddaughter, and everything about me must be in keeping with the rest of his belongings, that is all. He never considers my individual tastes or wishes. Just at first I was pleased with the costly presents he lavished upon me, now I hate them. The only things I possess which I consider really my own, are poor Mrs. Western's little keepsakes, and stay, you shall see it—this worn cornelian heart. Do you recognise it?"

I did. I had missed it from my mother's watch-chain, when she came back from Morfa.

"Shall I tell you how I came by it?" One day when I was ill, I fell asleep with it in my hand. I had been very restless, and it always soothed me to touch anything that assured me your mother was near. She would not disturb me, so she sat by my bed-side for hours without moving. I woke from that sleep nearly well. It was the turning-point in my illness. I had the heart still in my hand when I awoke,

and your mother said I was to keep it, to remind me to be thankful for my recovery. I sometimes wonder why I did recover—but even in my most bitter moods it does me good to look at this.”

“Why do you not make friends among the poor people round?” I asked. “Hilary says you used to visit the cottagers, and do many kindnesses among them.”

“Before I came out I had more liberty than I have now. It was Lady Helen Carr who persuaded my grandfather to forbid my going into the cottages and teaching at the school. She made the fever her first excuse for interfering, but she also managed to put unjust suspicions into my grandfather’s mind. He always now takes against any one whom I befriend. You heard what passed at dinner about the squatters on the Tan-y-Coed moor. Ever since I began to interest myself for them, my grandfather has been resolved to drive them from the neighbourhood.”

“But are you sure he has not a better reason for wishing the country to be rid of them? I thought so from what I heard of his conversation with Hilary. Did you not hear what they said?”

“No, I was too angry to listen. It does seem so hard that I should be quite powerless to help people who look to me to interfere on their behalf.”

Remembering her impatient words, and the flashing glances that accompanied them, I could not help saying, “Do you think you interfered in quite the best way?”

“Perhaps not. I suppose I ought to be prudent when other people’s interests are concerned. Well, I will try again to make your brother listen to the true state of my poor vagrants’ case. Let us go in now.”

After tea had been handed round in the drawing-room, Hilary, Rosamond, and I adjourned to the hall, where stood a noble organ, and enjoyed an hour’s music. Hilary blew the bellows, and Rosamond played and sang solemn strains of sacred music as Hilary or I asked for them. I soon left the choice to Hilary, though I was a little surprised to find how well he knew which composer’s music suited best with the tone of the organ and the compass of Rosamond’s voice. He had never condescended to pay the least regard to Nesta’s music, and I don’t think he knew one of her songs from another. The last song Miss Lester sang at Hilary’s request was

Mendelssohn's slumber-song. When I pause and turn my thoughts backwards, I can hear again the deep notes of melody rolling through the hall, and catch the complaining pathos (so it seemed to me) in Rosamond's voice, as she dwelt a little on the words,

"Have but a little patience, Slumber."

Hilary, still occupied at the pedals, bent his head forward to listen, and I was struck with the expression of his face. By some strange link of association, it made me recall a bit of mountain landscape I had come upon during my rambles the day before—a deep still pool among the hills, very much shaded with overhanging trees, into which a small mountain rivulet was slowly pouring its waters. I had come upon it suddenly, and looked at it for a long time. The pool was so full of water, and the water lay in it so cold, so dark, so still, and yet it was drawing in ever more and more. Why did Hilary's face make me think of it, I wondered? When the last note died away, Rosamond rose and turned to speak to Hilary. He started up from his bending posture near the organ, and stoop bolt upright, drawing even a little backward into the shade, as if he were afraid that Rosamond's wide floating dress should touch him. I could have scolded him for the gesture, and for the expression on his face, both were so absurdly distant and proud. Rosamond's countenance changed too, as well it might; and when she spoke her voice, lately so sweet, sounded harsh.

"Cousin Hilary, before you go, I want to speak to you. I hope you don't mean to take against those poor wandering people who are trying to make a home for themselves on the Tan-y-Coed moor."

"It is not a question of taking against them individually," Hilary answered; "but you know well that Mr. Lester is resolved not to allow vagrants to squat on the moor. I could not conscientiously advise him to do so."

"Conscientiously! I must say it is a kind of conscience quite incomprehensible to me, which obliges you to hunt a family of starving wretches from the last miserable shelter they have contrived for themselves—a shelter which a dog would not envy them."

"You are right in calling it a miserable shelter, and my conscience (believe in it or not, as you please) does not permit

me to encourage human creatures in living contentedly like dogs."

"Are you ready to help them to live in any better way?"

"Certainly I am. If the man, who is strong and able, chooses to work, there is work for him at the mines, and I will make it my business to find his family house-room in one of the villages. I have told him so once, and shall again before I stop the building of the hovel on the moor."

"You mean to stop it, then?"

"Your grandfather orders it, and I cannot reasonably try to make him alter his determination."

"Are poor people never to have any choice, then? If that family prefer to live in a mud hovel on the open moor instead of in a house in the village, why should you interfere with them? You don't want the moor yourself—its waste land. Why grudge it to them?"

"I beg your pardon, but you really are misstating the question. The moor belongs to your grandfather. He is surely right not to allow people of suspicious character, who will probably do great harm to other parts of his property, to settle there."

"Oh, cousin Hilary, you can't think how dreadfully selfish this sounds to me. We are to hunt down these wretched wanderers because we are afraid they will take a few sticks from our woods, or a rabbit or a hare from our fields, which we don't want ourselves in the least. Do you know that they have a sick child who can no longer follow them about? It is for his sake they wish to stay here; the mother told me so. I would give anything—yes, anything—to have them left undisturbed. But I suppose my wish will not have weight with any one."

Rosamond's voice sank as she came to the last sentence; she spoke it almost as if it were a question instead of an assertion. I saw the corners of Hilary's mouth twitch, and his eyelids tremble a little; and I, who knew him so well, understood this as a token of strong feeling resolutely repressed. To any one unaccustomed to read his face he appeared perfectly cold and passive.

"I am afraid I can do nothing to further your wishes," he said, slowly. "I have neither the power nor the right to cause Mr. Lester's orders to be disobeyed."

"Very well; we will say no more about it, then."

"If I might advise—"

"No, thank you. I wanted help, not advice. You say you cannot help me. I must therefore act for myself, or seek it elsewhere."

So saying, Miss Lester fairly turned her back on Hilary, and continued to converse with me till the time came for us to say good-night.

"Hilary," I said, as we were driving home, "are you sure you are right about those squatters? I must confess I sympathized in all Rosamond said in their favour. It does seem shocking that people who are living in such luxury as the Lesters should drive paupers away from their waste lands. Even Dives allowed Lazarus to sit at his gates."

"What an unreasonable, womanish way of putting the question," growled Hilary. "Can't you understand that Mr. Lester would be doing the worst possible thing for the whole district, if he allowed that waste land to be covered with squatters' huts? The moor ought to be enclosed. I've told him so a dozen times."

"If it is worth anything, why does not Mr. Lester enclose it? I thought bringing waste land into cultivation was his great hobby?"

"Yes, every piece of waste land but that Tan-y-Coed moor; about that he is just as obstinate as a mule."

"By the way, is not the moor close to our farm—mamma's farm?"

"Yes, it divides Tan-y-Coed from the Morfa estate. The boundary of the Morfa property falls within the moor, and that is the secret of Mr. Lester's dislike to begin enclosing. About a year ago there was a dispute between Mr. Lester and a neighbouring squire, whose property also touches the moor, about their respective claims to it. We were nearly having a lawsuit, but Mr. Lester grew frightened, and compromised the matter with Mr. Owen; I fancy he paid him a considerable sum to induce him not to urge his claim. If we were to begin to enclose, the question would all have to be opened up again. My mother might have something to say about it; part of the moor belongs to the Tan-y-Coed manor, if every one had his own."

"Would it do us any good to have it?"

"Not the least; for we have no capital to spend in reclaiming it."

"We might sell our right to Mr. Lester, as Mr. Owen did."

"What puts such money-making schemes into your mind this Sunday evening?"

"Oh, I don't know! only it does seem strange that the only little bit of land left to us out of our grandfather's estate should be that one poor farm at Tan-y-Coed."

"It is not at all strange. Our grandfather mortgaged every foot of ground he could mortgage to Mr. Lester, in order to raise money to work the Pent-y-Glas mines, which never yielded a penny till they came into Mr. Lester's possession. He could not mortgage Tan-y-Coed, because it belonged to his wife, and was settled on her children."

"Hilary, why was Mr. Lester so very much disturbed when his right over part of the moorland was questioned? Why did he pay a large sum to hush up the dispute?"

"Who told you he was *very* much disturbed?" asked Hilary, sharply; "I am sure I did not."

"Don't look so cross, and you shall hear. Yesterday I had a long gossip with Mrs. Morgan; it was not my seeking, I assure you; she insisted on keeping me company while you were away, and she entertained me for an hour with complaints about Mr. Lester's behaviour to her son. Her son, as I suppose you know, is an attorney now living at Tan-y-Bryn, who was once much trusted and employed by Mr. Lester. It seems they have quarrelled, and now, according to Mrs. Morgan, Mr. Lester persecutes her son, though his only reason for disliking him is that he suspects him of having given Mr. Owen information which induced him to set up a claim to the Tan-y-Coed moor. Mrs. Morgan says further, that Mr. Lester was so much disturbed by the fear of being drawn into a lawsuit that he fell ill—had a fit, I think she said."

"Was that all she told you?"

"Now, Hilary, if you are going to be savage, I will stop in my confession."

"No; go on."

"Well, she hinted that Mr. Lester had good reason to dread any lawsuit which might lead to strict inquiry into his title to the Morfa estate. She said, it would have been a good thing for us if Mr. Owen had persevered in claiming the moor, for that other things would then have come out. Hilary, do you think it would have been good for us?"

"No, I am certain it could not. Janet, I hope you are not going to believe everything that silly sly woman says to you. Her son is a rogue; Mr. Lester left off employing him because he found him out in dishonest practices, and he now tries to annoy and frighten Mr. Lester by throwing out hints that he possesses some secret knowledge which he could use to Mr. Lester's hurt."

"Is Mr. Lester frightened?"

"He is very much annoyed. He can be in no danger of losing the estate, for he has held twenty years' undisputed possession, and that in itself constitutes a title; but I can well believe that he would be sorry to have the particulars of his old transactions with our grandfather brought to light, I have no doubt that he took unfair advantage of Mr. Wynne's ignorance of business. It is in itself a suspicious circumstance, that the mines never became profitable until Mr. Lester owned them, though they were under his management from the first."

"Do you think Mr. Lester is a dishonest man, then?"

Hilary paused. "Since I have known him he has always behaved justly and honourably to every one. I have heard uncomfortable rumours about his conduct in former times, but it cannot be my business (trusted by him as I am) to rake up old accusations against him. Let us drop the subject; I am sorry we began upon it."

"Hilary, I must ask one question more. Is it possible—not likely, but possible—that any discovery about Mr. Lester's past conduct could give Morfa back to mamma?"

"No, it is quite impossible; no discovery of any kind whatever could disturb Mr. Lester's title now."

"If mamma had had any one to set up her claim twenty years ago, might it have been established?"

"I can't say; something might have been saved for her out of the ruin, or the whole property might have been wasted in lawsuits. I have no doubt it is better for us, and better for the Morfa estate, that Mr. Lester managed to step into peaceable possession."

"But one can't help wondering how it *might* have been; if, for instance, mamma's uncle, Llewellyn Wynne, had lived. By the way Mrs. Morgan was questioning me about him."

"Ah!" said Hilary.

"Hilary, I am sure she had a motive; I am sure she had

been told to pump me. I suppose there is no doubt that he is dead?"

"You sat under his tablet at church this morning," said Hilary.

"Yes; but he did not die here; you know he died on his voyage to America. Mamma has often told us about her grief when the news of the shipwreck came, a few days before her marriage."

"Well, what then?"

"I don't know; one can't help having fancies. Suppose it should turn out that he had been alive all this time, and suppose he were to re-appear in England?"

"My mother would be glad to see him, I dare say," said Hilary; "but I doubt whether she would have much cause to rejoice in his return. He left England in disgrace and debt, and from all I can hear of his character, was never a credit to the family. If he were living he would now be a very old man, considerably over seventy. It is most unlikely that he should be still alive."

"Would he have any claim to the Morfa estate if he were?"

"Most certainly not. Oh, Janet, can't you understand that no one can disturb Mr. Lester now? How hard it is to drive a plain matter of fact into a woman's head when it goes against her fancies."

"But I wonder why Mrs. Morgan is so curious about Llewellyn Wynne? I am sure she thinks Mr. Lester would be very sorry to hear he was alive."

"She is no better lawyer than you, then."

"But her son must be."

"Perhaps! For the sake of his clients it is to be hoped so. But, Janet, once for all, he is a rogue, and I would not put myself in his power, or be drawn to share his schemes, for any hope of gain. Don't indulge in covetous dreams, Janet. You were talking to me this morning about the 'shadow' of the Great House; I shall think it has indeed fallen on your heart if you let yourself be tempted to begin coveting it."

"You are right, Hilary. If Mr. Lester is now the rightful possessor of Morfa, it is coveting to build castles in the air about getting it back again. How far we have wandered from the vagrants! Let us talk about them again, and see if we

two cannot think of some arrangement which may satisfy Rosamond without irritating her grandfather."

We discussed this matter for some time, but Hilary saw difficulties in the way of every plan I suggested. The only conclusion we arrived at was, that Hilary should employ his first leisure afternoon in walking with me to Tan-y-Coed, and introducing me to the moor, and its would-be possessors.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Sweet is the rose, but grows upon a brere,
Sweet is the juniper, but sharp his bough;
Sweet is the eglantine, but pricketh near;
Sweet is the fir-bloom, but his branches rough."

SPENSER.

HILARY's spare afternoon was long in coming, but meanwhile my interest in the vagrants did not flag. I heard them talked about whenever I went to Morfa Mawr, and Hilary seldom returned home in the evening without bringing some fresh news of their doings. It soon became clear to me that Mr. Lester and his granddaughter were disposed to make the question of their going or staying a trial of strength between them.

Again and again, by Mr. Lester's orders, the poor mud-hut they were building for themselves on the moor was thrown down—again and again they were driven away, but invariably after an interval of a few days they re-appeared in the same spot, or in the neighbourhood, tempted back, Hilary feared, by the gifts Miss Lester contrived to send them to compensate for her grandfather's cruelty.

"I wonder how she dares oppose her grandfather's wishes so openly," I said, one evening when Hilary had been describing to me Mr. Lester's violent anger on hearing of their fourth re-appearance.

"She dare do anything that she thinks right," said Hilary, triumphantly.

"But can she think this right?"

"She would not do it unless she thought so."

"Well, that is arguing in a circle;" I said. "For once,

Hilary, I perceive that your head and your heart are arrayed against each other. You think with Mr. Lester, but you feel with Rosamond."

"I don't. I think she is behaving as foolishly as possible."

"Yes, I know what you think, I am talking of what you feel. I confess freely that I should like Rosamond to conquer in the battle she is waging on behalf of these unhappy people. I should like Mr. Lester to be tired out, and obliged to leave them in possession of their den."

"You are very foolish in wishing any such thing. You don't consider the harm they may do in a neighbourhood like ours."

"I think you good people of Morfa might defend yourself against one poor family. Would it be quite impossible to let them stay and try to reform them?"

"Quite impossible *now*. Mr. Lester will never rest till the place is clear of them. His temper has been roused."

"It must be an excessively ungenerous vindictive temper."

"An excessively tenacious temper—I suppose we must call it vindictive. My mother has told us how hard he found it to forgive his only son when he thwarted his will."

"Is he as faithful to his likings as to his hatreds?"

"Quite. Witness his constant affection for Lady Helen Carr. I do believe he looks upon her as if she *were* his son's widow. He has attached himself to her son entirely for her sake. If Mr. Carr had been anybody else's son, he would have been almost the last person Mr. Lester would have chosen to succeed him in the estate."

"Succeed him in the estate," I repeated, ponderingly. "Do you mean that Mr. Lester still intends Shafto Carr to marry Rosamond?"

"That is what I do mean."

"Well, he will certainly be thwarted in that purpose. He can't make Shafto marry Rosamond if he wishes to marry Neta."

I spoke confidently, but in my heart there was an uneasy misgiving. Morfa air had already infected me with the superstition that Mr. Lester's will was law.

Hilary was silent. I had hoped for an acquiescing word from him, but it did not come.

"Why don't you tell him that Mr. Carr is engaged to Neta?" I asked, crossly.

"I understood from my father that the engagement was not to be mentioned out of the family. Was there not some understanding of that sort between my father and Lady Helen?"

"Yes, she begged us to keep the engagement secret for a time. How deep she is, and how short-sighted we were! Hilary, does Rosamond like Lady Helen?"

"I believe not; and your question reminds me of something I wish to say to you. I had some talk with Mrs. Western to-day. She tells me that Mr. Lester blames her for having so little influence over Rosamond, and threatens to separate them."

"To dismiss poor Mrs. Western?"

"No; he threatens to send Miss Lester away from Morfa. He will ask Lady Helen to take her abroad for a year."

"Surely Lady Helen will not consent to act the part of a jailor," I said.

"She will persuade herself that she is doing a kindness to Mr. Lester. These domestic storms are very bad for him. He is not in a state to bear undue excitement. Mrs. Morgan did not exaggerate when she said that his annoyance about Mr. Owen's lawsuit nearly cost him his life. He had a fit, and was in great danger for some hours."

"But, Hilary, this makes Rosamond's conduct far worse than I thought it. If she knows that her grandfather is in a precarious state of health, why does she irritate him?"

"She has perhaps never been properly warned. Mrs. Western is weakly indulgent, and cannot bear to find fault with her."

"Why don't you speak to her—you who have known her so many years?"

"I!" The suggestion struck Hilary with so much horror, that he could not sit still under it; he closed the conversation by jumping up and pacing the room with hurried steps for the rest of the evening.

When he was lighting my bedroom candle, he took up the thread of discourse where he had left it.

"Not I, but you, Janet," he said; "it is you that must speak to Rosamond Lester, and make her see the duty she owes her grandfather."

"It is my turn to say 'I' now," I answered. "I have known Rosamond Lester just a fortnight; why must I be set

to lecture her? You have known her for four years, and are frightened to death at the notion; besides, my hands are full already with Mrs. Morgan. If you could but see her face when I attempt to insinuate any of the reforms you have asked me to bring about, you would acknowledge that one unwilling pupil is trial enough."

"Oh! if you think it a trial," Hilary began, resentfully; "if you have not sufficient interest in Miss Lester to wish to be of use to her, let us say no more."

I had some difficulty in talking Hilary out of this sudden fit of sullenness; but before we separated for the night, we settled that I should call on Rosamond the next day, and ask her to walk with me to the Tan-y-Coed farm-house. We should pass the moor on our way, and could not fail, I thought, when there, to get into conversation on the subject of Rosamond's conduct to her *protégés*.

Early the next morning, Hilary drove me to the foot of the hill, and let me into the Morfa grounds by a side gate which opened on the west garden. I knew I should not find Rosamond in the house at that hour, but she had pointed out her favourite garden haunts to me. One of them was a raised grassy seat at the bottom of the hazel-tree walk, and there I went to seek her. I saw her long before she saw me. She was sitting bareheaded on the low seat, holding a hazel-bough before her face, to shade her eyes from the sun, which fell full upon her. I noticed that, during all the time I was walking down the long terrace, she never changed her position, or even looked round.

It was a still day; the leaves of the hazel-bough cast a moveless shadow over her face; the unoccupied hand hung listlessly among the folds of her white dress; her eyes seemed fixed on the point where the still blue water met the hot, cloudless sky. She scarcely seemed to be enjoying the scenery round her. It was rather as if she were herself a part of it, as were the hazel-trees behind her and the daisies at her feet.

To see Rosamond at rest, one would think she would never willingly move; to watch her bounding step on the hills, one would think she would never willingly be still. But, indeed, everything about her had a tendency to run into extremes. She was more indolent and more energetic, prouder, and more humble, more resentful and more tender,

than any other person I ever knew. She and I made great advances towards intimacy during that morning's long walk. As we chatted together, she betrayed an intimate acquaintance with the ways and tastes of the different members of our family, which surprised and touched me. She knew my father's favourite books; she had even taken the trouble to read some of them. She was acquainted with Nesta's taste in music. She had heard, and remembered the names of most of our acquaintance; and she quite outdid me in recalling incidents of Nesta's and my childish days.

"I have so few relations, I am obliged to make the most of those I have," she said more than once, as a sort of apology for her interest.

We found so much to say, that I was in some danger of forgetting the object of my walk. It was Rosamond herself, who recalled it to me. We had left the Morfa woods far behind us, and were traversing a steep road which wound round a barren hill-side, when Rosamond stopped me.

"Do you see that narrow path leading up the mountain? Could you climb it? I want to show you something."

I demurred, for the path looked to my inexperienced eyes exceedingly dangerous, but Rosamond laughed at my fears, and, seizing my hand, dragged me up.

"Where are you taking me to?" I asked, looking with dismay at the green slope ending in a sheer precipice beneath me, and the steep ascent before.

"Only a little way. Do you see a thin wreath of smoke coming out of the earth? Near there is our gaol."

I had no breath for further questions; I was soon reduced to climbing on hands and knees, and I was much relieved when, at last, Miss Lester landed me safely on a level square of ground, where I once more found safe footing. It was the entrance to a cave in the mountain side. At first I thought it was a natural fissure in the cliff, but further inspection showed me that it had been widened at the entrance, and prolonged by means of two rude walls of stone, roofed over by branches of trees and turf. A tattered, dirty shawl hung across the entrance. Rosamond drew it aside.

"Let us enter," she said; "the place is empty, and I want you to have a good view of the palace we are all fighting about. Here, the enemies my grandfather and your brother

are hunting, have turned to bay. The earth has opened its mouth for them, you see."

My first impression, on looking round, was a pleasant one ; the aspect of the cave brought recollections of delightful Robinson Crusoe stories to my mind, and made me half expect to find bread-fruit and yams growing outside the door.

A turf fire smouldered at one end, the smoke finding its way out through a cleft in the roof ; over it hung an iron pot, supported by three sticks. A woman's red cloak looked picturesque against the white chalk stone walls, and on a rough seat formed of piled turf sods lay a net, a quantity of cords and lines, a basket of rock samphire, and some scattered poultry feathers, very suggestive, I afterwards reflected, of the contents of the pot over the fire.

While I examined each of these objects in turn, Miss Lester went up to a heap of rags which lay on the floor in one corner of the cave. As she drew nearer, a dark head of hair, surmounting a wan childish face, reared itself up from among them, and two wild bright eyes turned angrily, distrustfully, from her face to mine. The sight of that face, and of the shrunken figure to which it belonged, dispelled my pleasant pictures of healthy adventurous life. I had seen sadder, more suffering faces among the poor in London, but never one that struck me as having so little of civilized humanity about it. One angry glance the child bestowed on each of us, and then, with a little impatient twist of the shoulders, he cowered down, and hid himself among the straw and rags that formed his bed.

Rosamond made repeated but vain efforts to coax the child to look up again. "I wish I had something to give him to eat ; he would understand that," she said.

"Is he an idiot ?" I asked.

"Oh, no ; the other children are quite as wild, but I believe they are clever enough—too clever, people say. There is one peeping at us through the curtain."

I turned to look, but had only just time to catch a glimpse of a brown face and another pair of wild black eyes, before the owner of them slunk away. The loud barking of a dog, which seemed to come from some other underground retreat, now startled me, and not being particularly anxious to encounter any other members of the colony, either biped or quadruped, I suggested to Rosamond that I should be glad to

begin my descent of the mountain side. As we left the cave Miss Lester slipped some money into the sick child's hand. The thin brown fingers closed tightly, understandingly, over it, but no word of thanks followed ; the sullen face was not raised or even turned to us for an instant.

"Now," Rosamond said, when we had scrambled down to the beaten path again, "tell me what you think of them?"

"Are they gipsies?" I asked.

"The woman is, but the man is not ; his name is Connor. He is quite a character. He seems to have travelled all over England and Wales, and to have tried all sorts of occupations and trades. He has a great deal to say for himself, and holds very strange opinions. I had quite a long talk with him one day. He has an unprepossessing face I must admit, and I fear a bad temper, for his wife and children seem afraid of him ; but, as far as that goes, so were Mr. Lester's. If that were reason enough to turn a person out of doors, there would be a great many vacant houses."

"But you know it is not the reason," I answered, shaking my head. "I am glad you have shown me your *protégés*; but I must confess I have not seen anything that does not confirm Hilary's opinion of them. I can believe they are not particularly desirable neighbours."

"I don't say they are."

"Then why do you persist in keeping them here?"

"I protect them just as I would any other ill-used, friendless creatures, as I would go out of my way to save a spent fox from being torn to pieces by the dogs."

"But would you save a wolf?"

"My comparison is a juster one than yours, a very fair one I think, for it is the farmer's hen-roosts that are most endangered by my friends' neighbourhood."

"I wish I could convince you that you are doing no kindness to these people in tempting them to stay where, at best, they can have so few advantages, and must have so much to suffer. Are you not deluding them with hopes of more substantial benefits than you have it in your power to give?"

Rosamond looked thoughtful. "To tell you the truth," she said, "I begin to suspect that they have another protector. It cannot be the little I give them which tempts them to hover about this place so long. Something I heard

the other day convinces me that I have an unexpected ally. Have you ever heard of Mr. Morgan of Tan-y-Bryn?"

"Do you think I could have lived all this time in the same house with his mother without having heard more than enough about him?"

"Then you probably know of his quarrel with my grandfather. He and Mr. Lester were great allies once, and are bitter enemies now. Their first subject of quarrel was, strange to say, the corner of the moor which my squatters covet. Mr. Morgan was heard to say it did not belong to my grandfather, and my grandfather cannot forgive him for saying so. It is singular that any one should consider a corner of waste land worth fighting for; yet nothing disturbs Mr. Lester so much as hearing his right to the moor questioned. I suspect Mr. Morgan—who would do anything now to annoy my grandfather—is preparing some attack upon his title, and that he encourages these squatters to build upon the moor that he may have an apparent motive for doing so. I gather this from something I heard on my yesterday's visit to the cave. You must not suppose I have any dealings with Mr. Morgan."

"I should not suspect you of such conduct," I answered, warmly; "but—"

"Well, go on."

"I think, having this suspicion, you ought to warn your grandfather. However hardly he may have behaved to other people, he has been kind to you. It is most strange that you should range yourself with his enemies."

"It must seem strange to you, who have had no experience of divided interests in your home. I have not been so happy. The very first feeling that grew up in my mind—along with my love for my mother—was dislike to my grandfather. Don't looked so shocked. In excuse for myself I must say that my dislike to him seemed a part of my love to my mother; for I believed that all the sorrows of her life were occasioned by him. He was always interfering between her and my father. I remember, from my earliest days, the domestic storms that invariably followed the arrival of a letter from Mr. Lester; how my mother could never rest till she had read it, and how the reading always ended in a quarrel between her and my father. She would shut herself up for days with me, weeping; and telling me how

my grandfather kept my father in poverty and exile through hatred to her ; and that he wanted to separate her from her husband and her child. It was the constant dread of my childhood, that some day this formidable grandfather would come and drag my mother away from me. When I was about nine years old my mother died, after a very short illness, and my grandfather came to join my father at Nice, where we then living. My mother's death almost broke my heart ; and though I was nine years old, I was unreasonable enough to connect my grandfather's coming with my loss of her. He arrived the day after my mother's funeral, and before he entered our house, everything connected with her was carefully put out of sight. Her picture was turned with its face to the wall ; and every one seemed anxious to forget that there had ever been such a person. My father had been for years in very feeble health ; but when Mr. Lester came, he seemed to revive. We left Nice, and travelled from place to place, and had comforts and luxuries which I knew had been out of our reach before. How I hated them and everybody ! I cherished my grief for my mother because I believed that I was the only person who regretted her. Six months afterwards my father also died, and Mr. Lester brought me back to England—the most desolate-hearted, sullen child in existence, I think. Do you know, when I look back over those old times, I wonder that I have grown to be as much like other people as I am."

"Now you tell me all, so do I. It is a very sad history, —but you grew contented and happy when you were settled at Morfa with kind Mrs. Western, did you not ?"

"Yes, I had a few very happy years, though the sullen spirit would return at times, and I used to bring trouble on myself by rebelling against my grandfather. He proposed once that I should call Lady Helen 'mother,' and I would not. Oh, what a quarrel we had about it ! That was our first serious struggle, and I conquered. I would have died rather than called Lady Helen 'mother.' She behaved kindly in begging my grandfather not to press the point, or I should have hated her. Do you know, it was hearing stories about your home life, that gave me the first definite idea of duty I ever had. I admired what I heard of you so much that I set it before myself as an aim to become more like you, and so began to practise a little self-control."

"It must have been a very ideal picture of me you had in your mind," I said; "however, I am glad to know that we did figure in your childish dreams, for I suppose Hilary has told you how much our mother's recollections of Morfa mixed with ours."

"Yes; your mother's love for Morfa has always glorified the place to me. I have heard the poor people speak of her and of the old family till I feel as if she were an exiled queen, and we hateful usurpers keeping her from her right place. When you were a child, I dare say you did not build as many castles-in-the-air about your mother coming back to Morfa as I did. It was my constant dream. I confess that even now, I feel a sort of spite against my grandfather and myself for being upstart supplanters of an old family. You don't know how bitterly ashamed I often feel of the display we make of our ill-gotten riches."

"I think you ought not to encourage thoughts which destroy your respect for your grandfather. My mother does not grudge him his possession, and if she were here just now, I am sure she would advise you to submit to his wishes and make him as happy as you can."

"Would she, if she understood what my grandfather's wishes are? He wants to separate me from my dear Mrs. Western, and send me to live with Lady Helen Carr. I wonder whether you would advise me to consent to that, if you knew—" (here Rosamond hesitated, and then finished her sentence hastily) "if you knew what that first step in submission would lead to—what further much more important concession it would involve."

I did know, and I was far enough from wishing to give such advice. "Do you like Lady Helen?" I asked.

"I am afraid of her. She has a curious power over me. Rather than give her the chance of making a sarcastic remark, I say and do things that I hate myself for doing."

"I can sympathize with you. I know by experience how Lady Helen makes herself feared. How she can say the gentlest things and give the deepest pain by them."

"Ah! she has pained you, that is another bond between us; a bond that has united me to one friend already. My alliance with her son, Shafto Carr, is founded entirely on our mutual compassion for each other. When Lady Helen says bitter things to him, as she constantly does when she is in

a bad humour, I pity him, and *he* shows *me* like sympathy when my turn comes. It was simply a defensive alliance against a common enemy, but from it one of my greatest perplexities has grown up. It does not answer for an unhappy heiress to make friends."

Rosamond paused here, and looked inquiringly up into my face. If I had been at liberty to mention Nesta's engagement with Shafto, I should have encouraged her to pursue the subject I saw she was approaching. Being bound to remain silent on that point, I dared not allow myself to listen further; I felt that a half-confidence would be dangerous to us all.

We were now in sight of the Tan-y-Coed farm-house, and, in order to change the conversation, I began to remark eagerly upon the pooriness of the building, so very different from what I had expected to see. Till we reached the gate of the farm-yard, I rattled on about our old magnificent imaginations respecting Hilary's estate, and the disappointment I feared Nesta would feel when I gave her an accurate description of the reality. Rosamond listened with an air of interest, but the full flow of confidential talk did not return. She was too sensitive not to feel that I had checked her at the moment when she was going to open her heart to me. We found Miss Lester's pony-chaise waiting for us outside the farm. Mrs. Western had sent it round by the low road, to take us home in case we were too tired to walk back over the mountain. I was glad to see it, for I was very tired, and had hardly energy left to give the curious house and untidy farm-yard the minute inspection I thought they deserved. While I was peering about the various old nooks, and learning how oat-cakes were baked over the peat fire in the kitchen, Rosamond made a hasty sketch of the house to send to Ernestine.

I was glad I had this sketch to show to Hilary when he returned in the evening. He was so occupied in admiring it, and so pleased to dwell on the kindness that had prompted its execution, that he was disposed to be better satisfied with the result of my attempt at advice-giving than I was myself. When I thought over what I had said and left unsaid, I could only comfort myself with the resolution that my first attempt to win Rosamond's confidence should not be the last, and that I would not let our intimacy decline for want of intercourse.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“ Heigh ho ! the wind and the rain ;
For the rain it raineth every day.”

Twelfth Night.

It was very well to resolve, for I had not then experienced the determined opposition that Welsh rain and mist might interpose against any plan which depended on being able to leave the house. The day of our walk to Tan-y-Coed was the last of the fine weather. For the next ten days the four windows of the octagon room afforded a uniform view of rolling white mists, or driving sheets of rain. I could watch the rain-showers with satisfaction as they swept over the hill-sides, bending the heads of the shivering trees, and turning the tiny watercourses into angry little rivers, which did not know how to make noise and bustle enough in hurrying down to the valley. The mists sent me shuddering to the wood-fire, and caused me to waste a great deal of time in trying to discover some spot in the octagon room which was not exposed to a draught from one or other of its four windows and three doors. The harvest was not safely housed when the bad weather set in, and Hilary suffered much uneasiness of mind in consequence. I could not persuade him that he did not make the rain less destructive by riding through it, and coming home drenched several times every day. He either believed that he did the corn-sheaves some good by watching them as they were whirled by the flood through the valley, or else he preferred even that occupation to remaining quietly in the house. When the mists and I were alone together in the octagon room, I occupied myself a good deal in wondering how the bad weather affected two very differently circumstanced families in my neighbourhood. How would the squatters shelter themselves from the storm in their windy cave, and what would be Rosamond's and Mr. Lester's reflections concerning them during the long days when they could have no out-door occupations to divert them from thinking ?

We heard of the Connors first. One very wet, stormy afternoon, Hilary returned to the house in a state of great agitation, and summoned me to hold a hasty consultation with him in the kitchen. He had met Connor on his way to

the village, and learned from him that his wife was ill, and the sick child in a dying state. After a little discussion as to the best means of helping them, Hilary determined to go himself to the cave to see what could be done, and as soon as I had provided him with such warm clothing and nourishing food as we could get together quickly, he set out.

I watched him from the window galloping down the road, with a basket on his arm and a bundle of blankets and clothes strapped before him, and then I had a weary waiting-time. The September day wore to an end at last, and the storm and rain abated as the night fell, but still we had no news of Hilary. I was obliged to make friends with Mrs. Morgan and sit in the kitchen, discussing every possible and impossible accident which might befall a person on a Welsh mountain, so unendurable did I find the solitude of the octagon room as the hours passed. It was half-past eleven when Hilary came in. His clothes had had time to dry since the rain ceased, but he would not let Mrs. Morgan pity him on the score of being fatigued and hungry. Even I received short grave answers at first, and only learned what I wanted to know through sheer perseverance in questioning. Hilary had witnessed a painful scene, and he could not make up his mind whether some feeling of self-accusation would not always darken his remembrance of it. The Connors had suffered much since the storm set in, partly from the exposed nature of their abode, partly from want of food and firing. The sick child had become rapidly worse during the week. Connor had gone up many times to the Great House to inquire for Miss Lester, and had been roughly sent away by the servants. On returning to the cave that afternoon from a last attempt to get sight of her, he had found that one of the loosely-built walls at its entrance had been blown down, and that his wife had been seriously injured by a blow from a falling stone. Hilary would not give me a description of the state in which he had found the cave and its inhabitants when he arrived there : he evidently did not like to think of it. He had done what he could to relieve their most pressing necessities. He had brought a doctor from the village to set the poor woman's broken arm, and to see the dying child, who was, however, too far gone for medical aid to avail him anything.

Full as he was of compassion and remorse, Hilary did not alter his opinion of the Connors, and he would not encourage

me to hope that we should be able to render them more than temporary service. He was resolved to help them as much as he could, but he saw they would prove difficult people to serve. The woman had been sullen, the man violent and full of threats against Mr. Lester, to whose cruelty, he said, he should always attribute the death of his child. Hilary hoped these threats would never reach Mr. Lester's ears. As it was, he feared his irritation against Rosamond would be increased by that night's sad occurrence. He would blame her for all the evil consequences that had followed the return of the Connors to the moor.

"Rosamond will be bitterly sorry for the death of the child," I said. "Surely her grandfather will not aggravate her pain by throwing blame on her. He ought to accuse *himself* of harshness."

"He might, perhaps, if the Connors were different sort of people, and if Miss Lester and Morgan had not taken up their cause. As it is, he will only grow more irritated, and consequently more obstinate and unreasonable."

"He is a regular tyrant," I cried. "Hilary, I wonder whether we should have become as proud and overbearing, if we had had the Great House?"

"There, do you hear that clock striking two?" said Hilary, wearily. "If you don't go up stairs we shall have the sun rising before we have been in bed."

I hoped Hilary was able to compose himself to sleep more quickly than I did, for I had not closed my eyes before I heard him go out again in the cold, rainy dawn of the early morning. When we met at breakfast, he brought me news of the Connors, and detailed a great deal of business that he had got through on their behalf.

The poor child had died in the night, but he had made arrangements for the removal of the sick woman and the rest of the family, to a comfortable lodging in the village.

Hilary promised I should visit Mrs. Connor when she was settled in her lodging, but he would not permit me to go to the cave; he considered the ascent of the mountain unsafe for me after the long-continued rain. I consented to remain quiet that day, but felt a little ashamed of my idleness when I heard from Hilary, on his return at night, that Rosamond had visited the cave, and stayed with Mrs. Connor till she had been safely conveyed down the mountain.

Hilary and Rosamond had met during the day, but I did not hear what had passed between them. Hilary seemed indisposed to enter into particulars. I gathered that Rosamond grieved bitterly over the death of the child, and that her indignation was strongly roused when she heard Connor had come to the Hall several times to seek her, and had been turned away by her grandfather's orders. Her anger and excitement were so intense, that Hilary feared she would be led to speak and act in a manner she would regret afterwards.

It was sad for Mr. Lester that his foes should be of his own household, but we could not help pitying Rosamond far more than we blamed her. Bitter thoughts, self-blame, and blame from others would, we feared, rise up for her on every side.

She was, certainly, much to be pitied, and Hilary, consequently, did little else than pity her all the evening. I thought, indeed, that she received rather more than her share of compassion, for we busied ourselves more with her feelings for the sufferers, than with those of the sufferers themselves.

Late at night, Hilary received a note from Mr. Lester, requesting him to call at Morfa Mawr during the afternoon of the next day. I could see that he was glad of the summons. He explained his eagerness by saying there were several matters of business which were at a stand-still for want of Mr. Lester's consideration. It might be so, but I did not believe it was excessive interest in these affairs which caused Hilary to be so restless the next morning that he could not settle to any occupation ten minutes at a time, but was driven to relieve himself by constant dashes into the wet garden, or raids upon the men at work in the farm-yard.

The afternoon was tolerably fine, so I employed myself, during Hilary's absence, in walking down to the village to see the Connors. I took with me a basket containing a plentiful dinner for the children, and some comforts for the sick woman, and I flattered myself that my presents would secure me a welcome. I was mistaken; my gifts and myself were received with a sullen indifference that entirely discomposed and silenced me. Indeed, if I had had courage to enter into discourse with any member of the family, I should have been puzzled what to say, the serious and comforting words that I had had in my mind during my walk would have seemed so inappropriate to the condition in which I found them. The man was stretched on the floor, appa-

rently in a deep sleep, for he never moved or looked up while I remained in the room. The woman looked excited, her face was flushed, and she stammered when she tried to speak.

There was a strong smell of spirits in the room. Miss Lester had clearly done wrong in supplying them so liberally with money, for they were using it to their own hurt. The wild boys began immediately to quarrel and fight over the contents of my basket.

In strange contrast to this sad scene lay the little pale corpse. By Rosamond's orders it had been decently laid out on a clean bed in an adjoining room. The shrunken face, now that the dark elf-locks were, for once, combed and arranged smoothly round it, looked almost pretty. The wasted hand held a white moss-rose, which Rosamond had placed there. The poor little body had never, perhaps, had so much care bestowed on it while it held a spirit.

Never did I return from a visit to a poor person's house more thoroughly saddened than when I left the Connors. I had so little hope that any of those now interested in their welfare would have sufficient wisdom not to do them harm instead of good.

I had made up my mind that I should have to wait long for Hilary's return, but I was mistaken. For once in his life he was punctual to the hour, and consequently, home before me. Mrs. Morgan seemed to think this a portentous circumstance, for she met me at the gate with a long face, and the news that master was *waiting* for dinner. I ran in, quite breathless with expectation.

"Well, Hilary, tell me what has happened," I said, not forgetting to shut the door cautiously behind me.

"Happened! what should have happened, except that you are late for dinner? Go and take off your bonnet; Mrs. Morgan is furious."

I went, but I was not deceived; Hilary *had* something to tell me, but I must bide my time.

When dinner was over, and prying eyes and ears withdrawn to the kitchen regions, I took out my work-box, instead of my writing-desk, as a hint to Hilary that I was ready to listen. He was not, however, yet in a communicative mood. He paced the room with slow, monotonous steps, till I grew nervous with watching him. I was just about to move softly to my desk and take up my pen, when he suddenly

dropped into a chair, pushed his hair from his forehead, and relieved himself by a deep sigh.

"There's one good point about you, Janet," he began, "you understand when to hold your tongue. I know you are dying to hear what passed at Morfa Mawr to-day, and yet you have had the sense not to ask a single question."

"Not dying to know," I said, proudly resolved to keep up my character for discretion; "I don't at all wish to know anything you had rather not tell me."

"Humph!" Hilary sprang up, and took another turn in the room. He was now dying to tell me. "I have nothing to say that can give you pleasure," he began again.

"Then perhaps you had better not say it," I answered, drawing my desk towards me, and dipping my pen into the ink.

"Come, come, Janet," cried Hilary, "do leave those odious letters. Surely, when I have been out all day, and you have had nothing on earth to do but scribble, you might spare me an hour in the evening."

I laughed; "Well, then, let us be candid, and confess each to our own weakness. I am dying to hear what passed at Morfa Mawr, and *you* are dying to tell me, so sit down and begin at once."

Another deep sigh prefaced Hilary's speech. "I wish I cared less about them all," he said; "I wish I could mind my own business, and not trouble myself over their quarrels and sorrows. I am a fool for doing it."

"But you would not be Hilary Scott if you could live among people, and not trouble yourself with their sorrows," I cried.

"All the same, it is no business of mine," said Hilary. "I cannot understand Mrs. Western; she is certainly not a judicious person. She *will* tell me more of what is passing in the family than I have any right or wish to know. She throws out hints, too—absurd hints—about my advice and influence having greater weight than any other person's. She said she had observed this for years. It would be ridiculous to suppose there was any truth in what she said. Would it not, Janet? perfectly ridiculous!"

The forced laugh which concluded this question seemed designed to cover the anxiety with which it was put.

"But, Hilary, why are Mrs. Western's hints so absurd?"

I have heard many people say, since I came here, that you have great influence with Mr. Lester, and that he does depend very much on your judgment."

Hilary tossed himself back impatiently in his chair. "Of course, in matters of business Mr. Lester trusts my judgment, or I should not be here, there is no question about that. We were not speaking of business, or—or of Mr. Lester."

"Oh, it is Rosamond, then, whom you are to advise. Well, why not? I wanted you to remonstrate with her before. Are things going on very badly at the Great House?"

"Very badly. Mr. Lester was out when I arrived, but Mrs. Western had ordered that I should be taken to her sitting-room. I was there alone with her for an hour, and since she would talk, I could not help hearing. Poor woman! she is beside herself between those two. She has a sincere affection for her pupil, and a feeling of gratitude towards Mr. Lester, and it breaks her heart to see them at open war with each other."

"Is it open war, then?"

"I am afraid it has come to that at last. Mr. Lester was exceedingly angry with Rosamond for visiting the Connors yesterday;—he spoke very sharply to her on her return, and she defended herself, reproaching him with hardness. She was even imprudent enough to repeat, in his presence, some of Connor's threats, and to say that she considered him justified in his desire for revenge. They parted at night in mutual indignation. Mrs. Western did all she could to persuade Rosamond either to keep away from her grandfather this morning, or to apologize for her unbecoming words. Unhappily, she would do neither. She came down and seated herself at the breakfast-table as usual. Mr. Lester took no notice of her, said nothing till the letters came in. Among them chanced to be a letter from Morgan about this very business of the Connors. Mrs. Western does not know what was in it, but she gathered that Morgan must have used some expression which led Mr. Lester to conclude that Rosamond had instigated his interference on the Connors' behalf. A terrible scene followed. Miss Lester did not say a word to aggravate her grandfather, so Mrs. Western assured me, but she made no concession, denied nothing. She sat still and proud, as pale and quiet as a statue. At last, among other taunting words, Mr. Lester said that Rosamond inherited her

perverse disposition and her love for low people from her mother, and, on hearing this, she got up to leave the room. When her grandfather saw she intended to leave him without speaking, he became half mad with anger, and swore that if she quitted the room without apologizing for her disobedience, and promising to have nothing more to do with the Connors or Morgan, he would never see her again. For an instant Mrs. Western thinks Rosamond wavered. She stood a little time with her hand on her chair, looking down, and then she slowly turned, and left the room without a word."

"But will Mr. Lester never see her again? Oh, Hilary, how shocking!" I cried.

"He must," Hilary said. "He is surely too wise a man to consider himself bound by an angry vow. Rosamond must be persuaded to make the first advances towards a reconciliation—of course *he* never will."

"Mrs. Western wanted you to try to persuade Rosamond to submit, I suppose."

"She hardly knew what she wanted, poor woman. She had a vague idea that I could do something, and she did not consider how impertinent it would be in me to interfere between them, or how absurd it is to suppose that *she* would endure counsel from *me*."

"You did not see Rosamond, then?"

"Of course not."

"Hilary, you are a miracle of prudence," I cried.

"I am not quite a fool."

"Did you see Mr. Lester?"

"Yes, I waited till he returned, and had some talk with him."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Not a word about the Connors; nor did he mention Morgan till I was taking leave. He signed the papers I brought, and listened while I explained the business I had to lay before him. He appeared to attend as usual; but, Janet, I was very much struck by his look and manner—struck and surprised. I can't get over the impression it made upon me."

"Is he angry, or in any way offended with you?"

"No; I have often seen him angry—I know how he looks when he is angry—but I have never before seen him as he was to-day. Janet, I am not a fanciful person, but I could

not help thinking that he looked like a man who had suddenly heard some very startling news. After all, he might only be tired. It must be living with you, Jenny, that makes me get such fancies into my head."

"And he had been speaking to Mr. Morgan," I said, thoughtfully. "Did you not say that he had ridden to Tan-y-Bryn on purpose to speak to Mr. Morgan?"

"I did; but take care—don't let us begin to romance about it."

"What did he say to you as you were leaving the room?" I persisted.

"He asked me to send all the letters that had passed between Morgan and me respecting Mr. Owen's right over the moor."

"Hilary, Mr. Lester cannot care much about keeping the moor. If he has heard startling news, it must refer to more important interests than that. Hilary, have pity on my curiosity. What do you think Mr. Morgan can have said to him?"

"Nay, if I knew, I should be wise indeed; perhaps too wise for my own peace of mind and yours. I confess, Jenny, that a suspicion of there being more truth in Morgan's hints than I once believed, has lately forced itself upon me. I am driven to suspect that he has, or believes himself to have, a secret in his possession which gives him a certain power over Mr. Lester."

"But why, then, did Mr. Lester quarrel with him?"

"He did not quarrel with him till the twenty years had passed, during which a counter-claim to the Morfa estate might have been raised. The wonder is, not that he quarrelled with the Morgans at last, but that he permitted them, first the father and then the son, to fasten themselves upon him for so long."

"When did the twenty years expire, Hilary?"

"Before I came here—just before Mr. Lester renewed his intercourse with us."

"Just before? Hilary, I see it—his conscience and his promise to his son, forced him to do something for us as soon as he felt himself safe; he could not bear to think of us before."

"Come, we are going too far," said Hilary. "We have no right to impute motives. After all, I am an idiot for

giving way to a moment's suspicion. The twenty years have long since passed. Mr. Lester's title is established now, and it is vain to dwell on past possibilities."

"If the possibility of Mr. Lester's title being disputed is past, why does he still fear Mr. Morgan?"

"You ask as if you believed that I could answer," said Hilary, rather petulantly. "I tell you of the vaguest possible suspicion, and you cross-question me as if you thought I knew everything."

"Then, instead of asking questions, I will make a suggestion. Can the secret refer to Llewellyn Wynne?"

"Why should it? Why do your thoughts run always on Llewellyn Wynne?"

"Only because I learned from Mrs. Morgan, yesterday, that her son, during his father's lifetime, spent five years in New York; may he not have met Llewellyn Wynne there? You know Mr. Wynne sailed for America."

"And never reached it, according to all accounts we have of him. Janet, your suggestion is worthless. If Llewellyn Wynne were standing here in this room at this moment, his return would not affect Mr. Lester. Do you suppose that if he were alive, and if he knew that he possessed, or that our mother possessed, a shadow of a claim to such a property as this, he would remain inactive?"

"He may be very poor; he may not have sufficient money to return to England, and yet he may communicate with Mr. Morgan."

"No, no, Janet, I can't believe it. If Llewellyn Wynne were alive he would make his existence known to us. The poorer he were, the more he would need our help. Your conjecture will not do at all."

"Well, I have not another to offer."

"I am glad of it, for we have talked too long on this subject already. I wish I could recall my confession. To put the hope of regaining Morfa into your head is as bad as throwing a torch into a dry woodheap. It will possess you—it will drive out all the sense you have."

"Nay, there you do me injustice, Hilary. Imaginations are not harmful to imaginative people. The real danger is, when a matter-of-fact person gets possessed of a fancy; we true magicians have wands, and can keep our creatures in order. One fancy more or less will not trouble me. Don't

be angry, Hilary, if I say that you are in more danger than I from such a hope."

"I know I am in danger, and I struggle against it; but, Janet, you misunderstand me a little too. If the thought of regaining Morfa has attractions for me, it is not because I am covetous. I have seen enough since I came to Morfa to cure me of wishing for wealth. What I heard at the Great House to-day makes my heart sick. So much wrong and sorrow, and I can do nothing. I must stand aside, and say and do nothing."

Hilary looked so wearied and, as he said, heart-sick, that my compassion was moved. I perched myself on the arm of his chair, and began smoothing out with my fingers the lines that care was already beginning to trace on his brow; but I could not give him other than that silent sympathy. I knew too little of what was passing in his mind to venture to pursue the conversation further; or rather, I was then just beginning to divine his thoughts, and yet dared not presume on my discoveries.

The clock striking eleven roused us at last. Hilary jumped up to light my candle with an exclamation of relief that the day was over. I understood the feeling. "Good night," I said. "You see the days do pass, Hilary, and they cannot always bring such trouble as this one has brought. Gloom has hung over Morfa so long, that surely sunshine must be coming."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"There be none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence;

Upon princely suitors suing she has looked in her disdain;

What was I that I should love her, save for feeling of the pain?"

E. B. BROWNING.

I SPOKE presumptuously. The days did, indeed, bring changes, but I was hasty in predicting sunshine, for we were then far from having reached the darkest hour that comes before the dawn. As we were sitting down to breakfast the next morning, a note was brought to Hilary from Mrs. Western, entreating him to come immediately to Morfa.

Mawr. Some terrible disaster had evidently occurred there, but the confused wording of the letter left us in doubt as to what it was. Hilary gave me no time to exchange conjectures with him; he rushed to the stable, saddled his horse, and was gone while I was still puzzling over Mrs. Western's incoherent sentences. Mrs. Morgan was employed meanwhile in extracting all the information that Mrs. Western's messenger could afford.

She learned that he was on his way to the nearest town to summon a doctor for Mr. Lester, who had been taken suddenly ill; and she also discovered that he was not in any great haste to fulfil his commission. She found him as ready to listen to her questions as she was eager to ask them. When, after Hilary's departure, I ventured to remonstrate on this needless delay, I was assured that half-an-hour, more or less, could not make any difference.

"Mrs. Western might console herself by calling Mr. Lester's attack a fit," the man remarked, indifferently, "but everyone else in the house knew it was a fit he would never before awake from. If he were not already dead, he would be, long before the doctor from Tan-y-Bryn could reach Morfa."

It struck me very painfully that no one seemed anxious to take a more favourable view of Mr. Lester's case. Mrs. Morgan, and all the Morgans and Owens on the farm with whom in my restlessness I talked that morning, seemed to find a pleasant excitement in contemplating the extremity of his danger. They were quite unwilling to be deprived of it, when I suggested that he might possibly recover, as he had recovered two years ago from a similar attack. Morgan Owen thought his funeral would be a grand sight, and did not hesitate to affirm that a person had no business to disappoint the expectations of the whole countryside twice.

"Why two years ago there had been talk of his funeral—*now* he was like to die."

Before twelve o'clock Mrs. Morgan had mentally chosen the mourning Hilary was to give her, and decided the exact amount of the legacies each of the upper servants at the hall might expect. By dinner time her thoughts had wearied of the funeral rites, and were fixing themselves on another ceremony, which she had no doubt would shortly follow, namely Miss Lester's wedding. Mrs. Morgan decided that the young heiress would not be able to live

alone at the Great House for long. Everybody knew she was to be married sooner or later to Lady Helen Carr's son, a pleasant-spoken gentleman, not very wise, Mrs. Morgan thought, but easy to guide. Times would be changed for many people when he and Miss Lester had it all their own way at Morfa Mawr. Her son, for one, might come to be thought of, and rewarded as he deserved.

I could only escape from her loquacity by betaking myself to the pine wood, where I hoped to waylay Hilary on his return from the Great House. I had a long waiting-time. I saw the cathedral-like vistas of the wood lighted up to their furthest recesses by the level rays of the setting sun, and then I watched the coming dimness of twilight grouping the trees together in impenetrable masses of shade—and yet Hilary did not appear. It was a solemn sunset-hour to me. From the gate at the end of the wood I could catch a glimpse of the gleaming white walls of Morfa Mawr, over which the shadow of death was then hovering. How trivial, how mean, all my past desires and imaginations about it seemed now! Then I thought of Lady Helen's similar wishes, and wondered if Nesta's happiness or misery were involved in the question of life or death that was being decided in one of the rooms whose windows the sinking sun fired.

I was so engrossed in thought during the last half-hour that, though I was leaning on the gate, I did not hear the sound of horse's hoofs, or see Hilary till he was close to the entrance of the wood. When he caught sight of me he dismounted, and led his horse through the gate.

"Well," I said, coming up to him and looking in his face, "what news?" He was so grave and pale that I could not help adding, "Is it all over?"

"There," cried Hilary, sharply, "you are just like everybody else, so ready to imagine the worst. One would really think you were anxious that it should be over."

"How did you leave Mr. Lester, then?" I asked, meekly. "I have not lately left him. I don't come from Morfa Mawr."

"Where from?"

"From the station, where I despatched a telegram to summon Lady Helen Carr to Morfa."

"Do you suppose she will come?"

"She ought to come."

"To attend a death-bed! Lady Helen Carr! How little you know her. She won't come, Hilary."

"Who said it was a death bed?" asked Hilary, in a sharp voice full of pain.

We were now walking side by side along the wood path. I came nearer to him, and slipped my arm through his.

"Dear Hilary, I won't tease you with questions. Tell me as much or as little as you like."

"I don't want to keep you in suspense," he began. "Why should I? Only when one is feeling a thing very much one's self, the disposition indifferent people show to make a nine-days' wonder of it jars terribly. I have done nothing but answer questions for the last three hours."

"Had the London physician arrived when you left Morfa?"

"Yes. He does not hold out hopes of recovery, but he thinks there will be no change for some days, and that possibly there may be a return of consciousness before the end. He advised that such of Mr. Lester's friends as he would care to see should be sent for immediately. Mrs. Western and Miss Lester thought it right to summon Lady Helen."

"What is Mr. Lester's attack?"

"A paralytic stroke. The servant who came to call him early this morning found him insensible. Since the doctors applied the usual remedies he has showed signs of life. They think he is still unconscious;—I don't. Rosamond was in the room when he opened his eyes. It might be fancy, but I thought there was a look of recognition in them when they fell upon her."

"Oh, I hope so. I hope, if he is to die, that he will recognise her and forgive her before he goes. It is terrible to think that they parted last in anger. How does she bear it?"

"She commanded herself perfectly during the few minutes she was allowed to remain in her grandfather's room, and that is all I saw of her. Mrs. Western says that her remorse and sorrow are terrible."

"Lady Helen will be no comfort to her. I wish we could do anything."

"We!" There was a bitterness in Hilary's tone which made me look inquiringly in his face. He understood me.

"Janet," he began, "I may as well tell you, for if I don't, I shall always be thinking that you are trying to find out, and there will be no comfort in our being together. I don't expect you to believe that I am grieving over Mr. Lester's illness because of any great liking I have to him. He has been a friend to me, and in a certain way I shall be sorry to lose him; but I have not been thinking of him to-day. I can only think of his life or death as it concerns one other person whose happiness or unhappiness is hardly ever out of my thoughts. Janet, you know—or rather I hope you will never know—how terrible it is to see the person one loves most in the world suffer, and to have to stand apart from her sorrow—to be nothing at all in it. I used to fancy it hard that I must stand aside in the time of her prosperity, in the gay bright life that lay so entirely out of my sphere. Now I know *that* was nothing of a trial."

I could only press Hilary's hand, and say quietly, "I am sorry for you."

"You are right to say nothing more," Hilary answered. "If it had been any other day than this, you ought to have told me what a fool you thought me."

"But I don't think you a fool," I said. "I don't see why you should not love her."

"I do. I see a hundred reasons. I make no excuse for myself, except that I don't know how any one could see as much of her as I once did, and not love her. Now you understand all my mind. Let us say no more. My feelings are not what it concerns us to speak about to-night."

"No, we will talk only of her. If you think Lady Helen's coming will trouble her, you may set your mind at rest on that point. Lady Helen won't come to Morfa. There will be a letter to-morrow morning to say that she is too ill to travel. She will be afraid of the Great House in its gloom, and Rosamond in her sorrow."

"Well, they will perhaps do better without her. Yet it does seem sad that he should not have the only person he much cares for near him in his last hours."

"Will it be a very bitter grief to Rosamond if Mr. Lester dies? They do not seem to have lived very happily together."

"No; and in that thought will lie the bitterness of her grief. If she had done her best to make her grandfather happy during these last years of his life, she could better

bear to lose him. She will take all the blame of their disunion on herself. She will forget his faults of temper and think only of her own."

"Perhaps the trial may be spared her. Mr. Lester may recover. Was he not as ill once before?"

"Not *as* ill."

"Hilary, you said it was agitation that brought on the first fit. Do you think his interview with Mr. Morgan yesterday had any share in causing this second attack?"

"I do not know—how can I tell, Janet? Don't suggest a fresh cause of disquiet to me; above all, not that. As I stood by his bedside just now, and looked on his stricken form, I was ashamed of my yesterday's suspicions. He has been a friend to me—he has trusted me—why was I so ready to believe the worst of him? I must put all such thoughts out of my mind if I am to stay here, and act faithfully in his and *her* interests. You must help me, Janet; you must not hinder me by suggesting feverish fancies."

We were now passing through the further gate of the wood; Hilary would have hurried down the hill to the house, which lay straight before us, but I put my hand on his arm and detained him a minute by my side. I thought a minute's contemplation of the scene before us was the best help to peaceful thoughts that I could give him just then. Evening had already "saddened into night," but below our feet, in the direction of the village, were innumerable little lights glimmering here and there among the trees, in an irregular wavy line all down the valley. Other tiny lights, from lonely farm-houses and shepherds' cots, streamed out like sentinel fires from the sides of the hills. The evening star showed us where the sun had lately set in the western sea, and further away, a slender crescent moon, with a "star in its nether tip," hung between the two peaks of distant Snowdon, making all the sky silvery-light enough to reveal, by contrast, the dark mountain heads lifted up into it. Earth and heaven were holding out their signal lights to each other. The sweet solemnity of the scene fell upon our hearts as we looked, and remained with us for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XXX.

"We, too, have autumns, when our leaves
Drop loosely through the dampened air,
When all our good seems bound in sheaves,
And we stand reaped and bare."

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

I WAS right in supposing that Lady Helen would not come to Morfa, but, with all my knowledge of her, I was unprepared for the amount of needless trouble she contrived to give us in order to justify herself in keeping away. My time, for the next three or four days, was principally occupied in receiving and answering telegrams from Broadlands. She was always sending us word that she was on the point of starting; we were always preparing to receive her, and yet she never appeared. I did not grudge my share of the trouble; I could not have given my mind to any occupation unconnected with the events that were passing at Morfa Mawr, and my having undertaken the correspondence with Lady Helen, gave me an excuse for inquiring, almost hour by hour, how things were going on there. Thus, in weary suspense, passed those sunny September days. It seemed strange when I left the darkened house at Morfa—where people walked about with awe-struck faces—to turn into the sunny fields and green lanes, where the joyous bustle of harvest-gathering was going on, the more briskly for the interruption caused by the late rain. The air outside the house was so full of sunshine and busy sounds of active life, the air within so heavy with sorrow, and dark with the shadow of death. For many days Mr. Lester remained in a half-conscious state. It was as if the angel of death had been arrested in his work when it was all but done. The body lay motionless, hopelessly paralysed, but now and then there were slight movements in the limbs, and the eyes opened and looked round with a terribly anxious expression. It was a condition sad to witness, still worse to bear, if we might judge by the distressed look on the sufferer's face, and by his spasmodic efforts to make himself understood, which resulted only in painful, inarticulate sounds.

As days passed, his intervals of consciousness became longer and more frequent, and his powers of speech partially

returned. By the end of the week the doctors' final verdict had been given—the third fatal stroke might, they said, fall at any moment; but it was probable that the stricken man would continue in the condition he was now in for many months. There might be some improvement, but recovery at his age was not to be looked for. At first this opinion was received by those most interested in it, as a joyful reprieve. Rosamond's thankfulness at the prospect of her grandfather being spared till she could show him her repentance, was as great as her previous despair had been, and Mrs. Western and Hilary could not prevent themselves from encouraging her to hope the very best.

Before the end of my visit, however, the revulsion of feeling I feared had come upon them all. Quickly, as is ever the case when any startling event breaks up the old system of a life, a new routine of every-day occupation grew up, and they began to ask themselves how they should bear months, perhaps years, passed with that spectacle of life in death constantly before them. Mr. Lester was not easier to please in his days of suffering than he had been in health. He appeared gradually to recover the full use of his mental faculties; he knew every one who came near him, he understood everything that was said in his presence, and he appeared to retain a vivid recollection of past events. The difficulty he had in expressing his likes and dislikes only seemed to make him feel them more intensely.

Rosamond soon had to resign her dream of atoning for past lack of duty by constant loving attendance on her grandfather. From the first hour of his being able to recognise those about him Mr. Lester showed symptoms of increased uneasiness and irritation when she entered the room.

Mrs. Western told me it was terrible to see the expression with which his eyes followed her movements, or remained fixed upon her when she seated herself near him. It was not a look of displeasure, Mrs. Western thought, rather one of pitiful, restless anxiety, as if he dreaded what she might say or do. Every one of her visits appeared to do him so much harm that the nurse who attended him (an experienced, and rather formidable person, sent down by the physician from London) took upon herself to suggest that Miss Lester should for a time absent herself entirely from the sick room.

I happened to be with Rosamond one day, when this

woman waylaid us as we were on our way to inquire after Mr. Lester, and begged that we would not enter the passage leading to his room. His hearing seemed more than usually acute that day, she said, and when Miss Lester had come to the door in the morning, he had appeared excited and uncomfortable. It would be well for Miss Lester to keep quite out of his sight and hearing.

The request was rather unpleasantly urged, I thought. When Rosamond and I were alone again, I turned to her, thinking to say some comforting words about sick people being often unable to bear the presence of those they loved best; but when I had looked into her face, I felt the uselessness of attempting to gild over the truth.

"I deserve it," she said, "but don't say anything to me. Let me go away to my own room."

I never felt more sorry for any one than I did for her, as I watched her stealing away with hushed steps—that in her own home must not be heard.

This little incident occurred during my last visit to the Great House, and it filled me with so many painful thoughts that I could not help relating it to Hilary, and urging him to do all he could to strengthen Rosamond in her present resolve of staying with her grandfather at Morfa, even though she were not allowed to be much with him.

I foresaw that Lady Helen and Mrs. Western would persuade her to seek a gayer life elsewhere, and I felt that it was her duty to remain near her grandfather till she had tried to overcome his dislike by patient, persevering efforts to please him. I was sure she would hereafter count those her truest friends who encouraged her to persevere in this painful duty, and I also knew that Hilary was the only person likely to do this. Mrs. Western would shrink from imposing a life of self-denial upon her darling, and Lady Helen had, I knew, her own motives for wishing to draw Rosamond away from Morfa, and under her own guardianship.

Hilary listened attentively to all I said, but I could not draw from him the assent I expected. He hesitated and sighed, agreed and disagreed with me in the same breath, and at last grew angry with me for not divining the cause of his embarrassment. He had to put it into words at last, for I would not help him.

"Janet, take care what you advise me to do," he groaned.

"You have not realized into what circumstances you would throw her. Shut up at Morfa, her grandfather in that helpless condition, there would be no one to whom she could look for advice or companionship but me. It would be the old life over again. I cannot begin it again now that I have once struggled myself free."

"What old life?"

"The life we lived together when we first came to Morfa, when Rosamond was almost a child. She was glad of my company then, and of my help; when she wanted any indulgence, any pleasure, I must manage to obtain it. I was often able to gratify her, for Mr. Lester thought so little about her that he never discovered how many of the schemes I suggested to him had for their end the giving some trifling pleasure to her; and I—there was no harm in my acting so *then*—I did not know what I was doing: I do now. I dare not put myself into such familiar intercourse with her again. No, she is best away, or I must go; there is that alternative."

"I don't think there is," I answered, eagerly. "It would be acting ungratefully to Mr. Lester if you embarrassed him by throwing up your employment at such a time as this."

"It would give incalculable trouble, and injure several people besides Mr. Lester. I should be sorry to go; and yet—"

"You must not go," I answered, decidedly. "You are bound to remain here, and so I still think is Rosamond. Her duty to her grandfather stands before every other consideration. However, I will excuse you from the task of setting that duty before her, though, at the same time, I can't help thinking—may I say exactly what I think?"

"Say on."

"But you must promise not to jump up and begin to throw chairs about."

"Go on."

"I think, then, that you would not be so much afraid of advising Rosamond to remain at Morfa, or even of being again thrown into her company, if you had not at the bottom of your heart a belief—I don't say, that she loves you now—but that she might come in time to love you."

Hilary received my suggestion more quietly than I ex-

pected ; he was silent for a time, and when he spoke there was only a little embarrassment in his voice.

"But even if it *were* true that I had such a thought, it would not in the least affect what we were talking about."

"Would it not ? I think it does."

"If she liked me ever so much—and, mind, she does not, I only say if—it would make no difference in my duty ; she would still be a great heiress, and I should still be a poor man, bound not to take advantage of the peculiar circumstances that have placed her under my influence."

"Hilary, that is such a man's way of looking at things. You may call it generous ; I call it selfish. You are not considering what is best for her happiness, or even what is for her good. You are thinking what the world will say about your conduct to her. You are putting your own reputation for disinterestedness above her choice."

"Well, call it what you like, selfishness or honour or pride or what you will, there are some things that a man cannot do. If Rosamond Lester remains heiress of Morfa, I, situated as I am, never can and never shall say a word to induce her to become my wife. Now, Janet, there, I have said it ; don't fancy you can alter my resolution by your words. You can talk yourself into believing that black is white, but not me. I have suffered enough during these two years, and not come to this conclusion without plenty of pain, you may depend upon that."

"But, Hilary, if you were sure that she loved you."

"That I shall never be, for I shall never ask her ; besides" (hesitatingly) "she does not."

"I hope that she hates you, for you deserve it," I said.

My reply was apparently not what Hilary expected, for he threw himself back impatiently in his chair.

"My father would think me right, Janet," he continued, after a pause ; "he would approve my determination."

"In that case there is no more to be said. With this resolution, and the belief I hinted at, in your mind, you must not advise Rosamond to stay here ; and if she does stay, you must continue to make yourself as disagreeable to her as you have been doing lately. It is an uncomfortable state of things ; but, Hilary, I don't pity you quite as much as you seem to think you deserve. You are not really as despairing as you pretend to be. Unconsciously you have let me see at

what chink in your wall of obstacles the glimmer of light comes in. You said, *if* she remains heiress of Morfa—”

“Did I say *if*? How very absurd.”

“Not at all absurd. On that ‘*if*’ hangs the hope that upholds your love. Far down in your mind you have a faint expectation of a coming change which will reverse your position and Rosamond’s. Don’t deny it.”

“Why will you make me look at it?”

“Because this is my last night at Morfa Bach, and when I am gone we shall neither of us be able to speak of this secret idea which possesses us both.”

“I don’t want to speak of it. I want to forget it. Yes, Janet, honestly I do. Suspicions which were merely foolish before, become treacherous in my present position. If I accept the charge of Mr. Lester’s affairs while he is incapable of looking after them himself, I am pledged to devote myself to his interests, and I must forget my own. If I received information to-morrow which proved my mother’s title to Morfa, I, as Mr. Lester’s trusted servant, ought not to make it public.”

“Happily I am not Mr. Lester’s trusted servant, so I may indulge myself in what conjectures and suspicions I please. I am now quite sure that Mr. Morgan told him something which agitated him the day before his illness. I can see how curious both the Morgans are about this attack, and the son has a look of suppressed triumph on his face.”

“How came you to see Morgan?”

“He was here spending the day with his mother, and she would introduce him to me. I was politic enough to be very civil to him, and I flatter myself I made a deep impression. He thought he was finding out a great deal from me, and all the time I was studying him. Hilary, I mean to give Mr. Armstrong the benefit of my conjectures and discoveries.”

“He will laugh at you.”

“I shall not mind that. I must tell some one, and you will allow I could not have a wiser confidant.”

“Don’t have more than one.”

“You may trust me; when I have unburdened my mind to Mr. Armstrong I will let the subject rest. If he says there is nothing to be done, I will not even wish about it. I think things sometimes work round best when we let them alone;

when we are not fighting for ourselves, 'the stars in their courses fight for us.'"

There was a short pause, and then Hilary asked, "What shall you say to Miss Lester to-morrow, if she asks your advice about leaving Morfa?"

"You have frightened me out of all wish to influence her," I answered. "I cannot bear the thought of her being with Lady Helen. Yet, after what you have said to-night, I dare not persuade her to stay here. I shall escape my difficulty by not going to Morfa Mawr to-morrow. I will be very busy all day, and send a note of farewell in the evening."

"Nay, you must not deprive yourself of seeing her again; there is no occasion for you to make such a sacrifice as that."

"I can bear to make it," I answered, smiling. "Now, Hilary, we are not to begin the discussion again. I have several important household matters to talk about before I go, so please command your attention."

We tried to converse on indifferent topics, but by degrees our remarks worked round to the sole subject that deeply interested Hilary. He grew more communicative as I showed myself sympathizing, and discussed his feelings and his difficulties till far into the night. Even silent Hilary could be talkative when the plunge into confidence had once been made, and when the topic was Rosamond Lester.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"New Year met us somewhat sad,
Old Year leaves us tired,
Stripped of favourite things we had,
Baulked of much desired."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

I HAD come to Morfa to seek change of thought and interest, as well as change of air. I had found it, yet it was with a feeling of relief, rather than of regret, that I prepared for my return home. Hilary and Morfa were very well for a time, but I confessed to myself that it had been a sort of exile—that I could look at the golden harvest fields and purple

mountains and dancing waves, and yet feel my heart bound at the thought of exchanging them for the narrow London streets, and the air of my father's study. No more songs of birds for me, or sweet rustling of leaves stirred by the wind, or voice of the sea; but, instead, should I not hear my mother's and Nesta's voices, and my father's step, and another sound which I had missed here, a certain knock at our door, which now for some time past had had something very friendly in it for my ears?

With these anticipations, I found it difficult to sympathize in Hilary's often-repeated wish that I could stay with him a month or two longer. He thought I should be so very anxious about the state of affairs at Morfa Mawr, when I could no longer pay daily visits there, so deeply distressed at parting from Rosamond Lester, that he did not know how to pity me enough. It had clearly become incomprehensible to him that there could be any vivid interest in life apart from Morfa.

Rosamond's answer to my farewell note reached me on the morning of my journey, just as Hilary and I were setting off on our drive to the station. I had only time to read it hastily once through, for Hilary asked to see it, and in the bustle of parting at the station, neglected to give it me again. It was a very affectionate note, and I was sorry afterwards that I had not kept it, and that I did not write in reply on my return home. It was evidently written in a mood of deep dejection, and almost morbid self-reproach. Her farewell to me was more melancholy than the occasion needed. She seemed to speak as if her new resolution to atone for past rebellion by sacrificing all her own wishes to please her grandfather, must necessarily cut her off from all her old friends, and even make it wrong to cherish recollections of past happy times. I was somewhat alarmed for her when I came to ponder over the possible meaning of these enigmatical sentences, and I thought of asking Hilary to send me back the note, that I might read it to my father. He might, perhaps, suggest some wise words of comfort, or of caution against acting under the influence of overwrought feeling, which I might write to Rosamond, and which, coming from him, would, I knew, have great authority. I only hesitated to take this step because I feared it would lead to questions I could not answer without betraying Hilary's confidence.

While I hesitated, time slipped on, and I was startled one morning by hearing from Hilary, that Lady Helen had come down suddenly to Morfa Mawr, and departed the next day, bearing Rosamond off in triumph to Broadlands. He had not seen Miss Lester before she left, and he could not learn from Mrs. Western by what persuasions Lady Helen had gained her point, or whether Rosamond was glad or sorry to go. She was gone, he wrote, and there was an end of it. I did think that her residence with Lady Helen put an end to all hope of intimacy between her and myself, and I therefore let slip the opportunity of establishing a correspondence with her, a negligence which I had great reason to regret in after-times.

Perhaps, in truth, the many interests and anxieties I found awaiting me at home threw my concern for the people I had left into the background. At home, it was just as if I had never been away. After the first day or two, when of course I was required to answer innumerable questions about Hilary, everything fell into its old routine. My father went backwards and forwards to the school; the exercises accumulated fast, and had to be attended to; Nesta sat in the window over her work, as silently as before, and my mother, finding me less communicative than she expected on Morfa affairs, talked a good deal about an entire change of servants, that had taken place during my absence. I was breathing the old atmosphere again, walking in the old paths. I had longed for them when I was absent. I had promised myself that I would never again droop under the old burdens. How was it, that after the first week or so, I did not feel as I had hoped to do? Was I growing weak-spirited? or were the burdens really heavier by some one or two added "last straws?"

Before many days had passed, I could have told myself exactly what these final heaviest additions to the load were. My father was changed; his spirits and temper were more variable than I had ever known them before. During my absence Dr. Allison had paid a few days' visit to our house. I had heard that he reported favourably about my father's state of health. When I got home, I discovered that there were two opinions in the family concerning his verdict. My mother and Charlie resolutely put the best possible construction on every encouraging word he had said, and would not

give any weight to the discouraging ones. He had told them to keep up my father's spirits, and they believed they should best succeed in doing so by assuring my father constantly that there was no cause for anxiety, and that he would get quite well, if he only would believe he was recovering, and not fancy himself worse every sunny day, when he felt a little more pain in his eyes. Nesta and Mr. Armstrong, on the other hand, had received a very different impression from Dr. Allison's cautious words, and my father himself resented being told that he was better, when he felt worse, and disliked excessively to hear the matter discussed among us all. It hurt him that my mother and Charlie should attribute his sufferings to fanciful spirits and unstrung nerves; and sometimes he was moved by chance words which fell from them, to make exertions to which he was wholly unequal.

His daughters' extra care did not comfort him; I think he had rather we had left him alone, for our anxiety contrasted painfully with what he felt to be a want of sympathy in the other two. I could not make him understand that it was no failure in affection, but lack of courage, which made them act as they did. Neither Charlie nor my mother could bring themselves to face the coming trial; they thought it better to turn their backs upon it resolutely, and cheat themselves into believing that the danger was not there.

In Charlie, this cowardice resulted, I feared, from an inward conviction that he was neglecting to prepare himself for the crisis which might come. He confessed to Nesta and to me, that he could not resign himself to the prospect of having to take my father's place in the school. The very thought was so distasteful that it paralysed the little industry he had ever had. He acknowledged he had wasted his time shamefully during the last year, but he would lay the blame of his idleness on what he called his dreadful prospects. How was it possible, he asked us, that he could read very vigorously for honours, when the greatest success he could possibly win would only fix upon him more certainly the lot he dreaded? Since he had nothing to look forward to for the rest of his life but drudgery, he had better make the most of the intervening time. Of course Charlie kept these sentiments for his sisters' hearing, but there was a gloom on his face whenever the slightest allusion was made to his future occupation, which did not escape even my poor father's

blind eyes. This reluctance of Charlie's to give him the help his infirmity needed, was by far the bitterest of my father's sorrows. I was glad when Charlie's departure for Cambridge spared him the being constantly reminded of it.

I hoped we should be more cheerful when Charlie had taken his remorseful face and constant grumbling out of the house, but it was not so. Painful as his talk was, it had yet served to distract Nesta's mind from a second anxiety which gradually grew to be an all-absorbing one. I had seen from the first moment of my return that she was more unhappy than when I had left her, but it was some days before she could make up her mind to open her heart to me. Gradually, by sorrowful hints and half-confessions, I learned that while I had been away the Eastern letters had not come as regularly as formerly, and that the two last had given her great pain. It was only a misunderstanding, Nesta assured me eagerly—a misunderstanding which must soon be cleared up; but, while it lasted, it was very hard to bear, especially as she had not been able to keep her sorrow to herself, as she ought to have done. It appeared that several of Nesta's letters had failed to reach their destination. During the summer Lady Helen had usually asked Nesta to stay with her about the time when the Eastern letters had to be posted. She had some private way of sending despatches to her brother and son, and during the months she was in London Nesta had entrusted her with her letters, that she might share her privilege of writing as lengthily as she liked. Several of these lengthy letters seemed to have miscarried—at least no replies ever reached Nesta. For some weeks she had no letters from Mr. Carr, and then came an angry epistle reproaching her with her long silence. Nesta did not show me this letter, but she told me that there were expressions in it which led her to fear that Shafto believed he had other reasons for doubting her truth than the mere failure in writing regularly. There was no exact accusation from which she could defend herself, but throughout an implied distrust, which pained her all the more because it was so vague. Poor Nesta could not conceal the trouble into which this letter threw her, and my father and mother naturally required her to explain its cause. I think if I had been at home, I could have managed to persuade them to leave Nesta to defend herself. As it was, my father thought it right to dictate a

letter of remonstrance to Mr. Carr. It produced a short, haughty reply, in which Shafto, in his turn, complained of the want of candour with which he had been treated by every member of our family. He seemed to think we were seeking an excuse for quarrel with him. My father was much grieved by this letter, and wrote again—more decidedly, my mother told us, without being able to explain exactly on what subjects the letter had spoken with decision. When I came home, Nesta was waiting, with weary, sickening anxiety, for a reply to this second letter of my father's. One fortnight had already passed without letters, but Nesta persuaded herself that she had not expected him to write soon. It was better that he should not write till his anger had cooled, and he was in a mood to receive our father's expostulation kindly. When the end of a second fortnight came and brought no tidings, Nesta was seized with a conviction that something terrible had happened. She was sure that Shafto was very ill, perhaps dying, for he would not be so cruelly silent if he could write. She was so thoroughly persuaded of this, and so miserably anxious, that we all felt relieved when a letter came from Lady Helen Carr, in answer to one I had written at Nesta's urgent request. The first part of Lady Helen's letter detailed her plans for a winter's tour with Rosamond Lester; only quite at the end did she notice the sentence, in which I had rather insinuated than expressed a desire to know what accounts she had lately received of her son. What did I mean by putting such a question to her? she asked. It passed her poor comprehension. She always considered it an impertinence to give us news of Shafto, since we were in far more intimate communication with him than she was. He was a very unsatisfactory correspondent, and rarely answered a letter; but she was not anxious about him. She heard frequently from her brother, and the accounts he gave of Shafto's perfect health and brilliant spirits were so satisfactory, that she would not allow herself to be alarmed by my hints.

Perfect health and brilliant spirits! Nesta took the letter from me and read the words over again to herself. The colour returned to her pale cheeks, her heavy eyes brightened, and for a time she was comforted. *He* was well and *happy*. Her voice faltered a little as she repeated the last word; but she said it again and again when we talked over the letter

together. He was well and happy, and for herself—she folded her hands patiently—it was only waiting a little longer. He *could* not be very angry with her if he were happy. Yes, she would wait.

It was well for our family peace that Nesta's gentle patience and feminine reserve disposed her to agree with my father in thinking that she could do nothing but wait. She had written once to Shafto a gentle, dignified little letter, which ought to have removed any false impression that had been raised against her. Till her note had received some acknowledgment, she agreed with my father that it would not become her to write again. I used to admire her with all my heart, for I sometimes felt that I could not have borne so much pain in silence.

I do think that of all the unkindnesses one person can inflict upon another, that of keeping friend or lover waiting in suspense for an important letter is the cruellest. If a blow is to fall, let it come at once, not after all the strength to bear it has wasted away under the slow agonies of feverish expectation.

After an interval—I forget how long—came another letter from Lady Helen. It was a cheerful letter, provokingly kind and cordial. She informed us, that she and Rosamond Lester were going to start for Italy in a fortnight, and she entered into minute details about their intended tour. It included a visit to her brother at Constantinople, and possibly, if Shafto could be spared to accompany them, a short sojourn in the Holy Land. And, by the way, talking of Shafto (she wrote), what did we all think of his refusal to return to England? Of course we knew that his uncle had procured him the offer of a Government appointment in England, and that he had declined it, preferring to remain abroad. It was really very crazy of Shafto. Lord Denbigh had made the greatest exertions to obtain him the offer of this same appointment. What had Nesta been thinking of to allow Shafto to let slip such an opportunity? She really must look closely after him, and try to teach him to be more practical, or he would let his life pass before he had settled to anything.

Lady Helen wound up the letter by protesting that she should scold her son when she saw him, on Nesta's account. She would tell him plainly that his idleness exposed him to the charge of being indifferent to her, and really gave my

father and mother just reason to complain. The light words, the indifferent tone, jarred upon us all. I was sorry that my father had asked me to read the letter aloud, but I did not at the time anticipate the serious consequences that would result from his hearing it.

Lady Helen's innuendoes did not make much impression on Nesta. Her mind was wholly absorbed in contemplating one aspect of her trouble ; she could not see any other. Shafto was angry with her ; Shafto would not write, while this cloud hung over her, she had no thoughts to spare for anything else that he did or left undone. My mother ventured to remark timidly to my father, that we had no right to question the propriety of Mr. Carr's decisions on his own affairs. Till he wrote and explained himself, might we not hope that he had some sufficient reason to give for refusing to return to England, and that his prolonged absence did not necessarily show any reluctance to fulfil his engagement to Nesta ?

Unhappily, my father was of a different opinion. When I talked over Lady Helen's letter with him, I was dismayed to see the impression her words had made. The sight of Nesta's misery had, for some time past, been daily increasing his indignation against Mr. Carr. This new proof of his indifference destroyed the last remnant of his patience. He could no longer submit, he said, to see his daughter treated with contempt. When I tried to lay part of the blame on Lady Helen, and told him my suspicion that she had kept back Nesta's letters and misrepresented her conduct to Shafto, he silenced me. A man who could believe insinuations against Nesta was not worthy of her, he said, and should never be trusted with her. He had long blamed himself for having ever given his consent to Nesta's engagement. Now that such a strong reason for withdrawing it had arisen, he felt bound to act with decision. He should write at once, he said, to Mr. Carr, and tell him that he considered his long silence and his refusal to return to England sufficient proof that his affection for Nesta had declined. Such being the case, he thought it best for his daughter's happiness that the engagement between them should be considered at an end, and that their correspondence should not be resumed. My mother and I did all we could, first to delay the writing of this letter, and then to soften the expressions in it ; but my

father was inexorable. He believed that anything would be better for Nesta than the suspense in which she had lived during the last three months, and he thought the infliction of any present pain merciful which saved her from the great future misfortune of uniting herself with a man who had proved himself so little worthy of her confidence.

I took upon myself the task of telling Nesta when my father's letter was written, for I thought she could best bear to hear the painful intelligence from me. But how I dreaded telling her! She had been so good and patient during these trying weeks of suspense, that it seemed cruel to be in such haste to deprive her of the little thread of hope, to which I knew she would cling, so long as nothing was said about breaking the engagement on either side. I felt like an executioner, when I went up to her room the evening after my father had written to Mr. Carr. The first effect of my communication was rather different from what I had expected. For the only time in her life, Nesta was seized with a fit of resentment against us all, and her unaccustomed anger gave her a fictitious strength. What right had any one, even her father, to interfere between her and him, she asked. No one but herself could know how impossible it was that he should really change to her, or how utterly unjust it must be to bring such an accusation against him. She had no doubt herself that he had had a good reason for being angry with her. At all events, we had given him one now. He would be pained beyond forgiveness by my father's letter. She could never, she said, blame him again, however unforgiving he showed himself; she could not expect him ever to love her again now.

For a short time, Nesta found a sort of comfort in saying such words as these, it eased her sore heart to have some one to blame but him. To take his part against other people and think him aggrieved, seemed to put them at one again, and give her a sort of fellowship with him once more.

This mood lasted for a day or two, and then there came a reaction. She saw how deeply my father and mother were pained by her reserve towards them, and she had not the heart to cherish her anger any longer; it went out at once and left her almost heart-broken, with a feeling of remorse added to her sorrow. Those were terrible days. If Nesta and I had not loved each other so much, I don't know how she

would have lived through them. It was a great help to her, that all the fond exclusive love she had had for me in her childhood seemed to revive at that time. She clung to me, she seemed almost to live through me. I think a trouble that had come lately into my own life, helped me to understand her and comfort her better than I could have done a few months before.

After a time, from the very depth of her woe, a pale sickly hope gleamed up. Shafto must surely, she thought, write in answer to our father's letter, and in this reply she began to hope there might be some word from which she could extract comfort. Perhaps there might even be a farewell note for her. To have one more word from him seemed now to Nesta the only thing to be longed for. With that excuse she fell once again into her old habit of counting the days between the mails, and of having weary, weary watchings on certain days for the postman's knock, and terribly anxious moments, followed by heart-sickening disappointments when it came and yet never heralded the wished-for letter. Weeks passed in this way. No letter from Mr. Carr ever did come, and the autumn days darkened into winter ones before Nesta ceased to expect it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“ From all a closer interest flourished up,
Tenderness, touch by touch : and, last, to these
Love, like an Alpine harebell, hung with tears,
By some cold morning glacier, frail at first
And feeble, all unconscious of itself,
But such as gathered colour day by day.”

TENNYSON.

OCCUPIED as I was with many cares, I had not forgotten my resolution of telling Mr. Armstrong the suspicions that had dawned upon my mind while I was at Morfa. I found an opportunity for some talk with him one evening after I had been at home about a fortnight, and I did not spare him any details of my observations, or the conjectures I had formed from them. He listened with more interest than I had ventured to expect ; he even cross-questioned me about the

Morgans, and made memorandums of the information I had gleaned from them with a gravity which impressed me with a high sense of my own sagacity. When he had learned everything I could tell him, and pocketed his memorandum-book, he proceeded to destroy my complacency by telling me, that though he should keep the hints I had imparted to him in mind, he did not see the slightest reason to suppose they would lead to any useful discovery. He was sorry, he said, that Hilary and I had conceived such a suspicion, and he strongly advised me to put every trace of it out of my thoughts as quickly as possible.

He helped me to follow the advice he had given by never again alluding in any way to my Morfa visit. Indeed, after that one long talk, many weeks passed without my having an opportunity of exchanging more than a few words at a time with Mr. Armstrong. At first I wondered at the chance which always prevented our falling into one of our consultations over the school work, which had seemed a matter of daily necessity. By degrees it dawned upon me that it could not be chance that kept us apart, and I began to be troubled at the barrier of reserve which seemed suddenly to have sprung up between me and my old ally. I only noticed the change. Mr. Armstrong came to our house regularly, walking with my father to and from the school, and neglecting nothing of his old care of him, and my mother and Nesta counted him as much a friend of the family as ever. They did not seem to perceive that he had ceased to be my special friend, and I would not for the world have let any one suppose that I had noticed a difference in him. I was vexed with myself for being so grieved and pained by the loss of his old kindness, his old special care. I had not known before how much I valued it, or how impossible it had seemed to me that I should ever be without it. I knew that I had really nothing to complain of. I was certain that if I had had any real difficulty in my work for my father, Mr. Armstrong would have been just as ready to help me as ever. I observed even that he did help me in many unobtrusive ways; and yet—there was no use in denying it,—he was gradually withdrawing himself from our intimacy, trying, I felt, to accustom us to do without him.

My father was the only person besides myself who discovered that George Armstrong's visits were shorter than

formerly, and that he was less at home, less happy when with us. He comforted himself for the defection of his old pupil, by reminding me very often that George had much less leisure to give us than formerly, and that we ought not to be exacting towards an old friend. It was true that Mr. Armstrong's time was now very fully occupied. He no longer lived alone; his father had died while I was in Wales, and his mother and young brothers and sisters, who were left by his father's death wholly dependent on him, had come to live with him in London. With so many added cares and responsibilities, we could not reasonably expect him to give as much time and thought to us, as he had once given. So at least my father said, when he checked himself in his old habit of referring to Mr. Armstrong for help or advice in every little difficulty. Was I less reasonable than he, or was it because I knew Mr. Armstrong better, that I was not satisfied with this explanation of the change I saw? I had such confidence in his powers, that I was sure it was not for want of time that he left me to struggle alone through the work we had once shared. I knew he could always find time for everything he wished to do, and that he could have made old duties and new fit into each other if he had chosen. I was convinced he had a better reason for dissolving our partnership, and I do not deny that I troubled myself with many fears and conjectures about what this reason might be. I shall not write down all the foolish thoughts I allowed to torment me. The very worst of them all—a fear which sometimes haunted me—that he might have fancied I was depending too much on his help, and allowing his friendship to become too important to me, used to vanish every now and then before some unexpected kind look or understanding word, and, in spite of all my after-reasonings, my heart grew light again, and I was restored for a time to my old confidence.

During the autumn months a close intimacy sprang up between our family and Mrs. Armstrong. My mother was naturally anxious to show her every possible attention, and she was one of those people who hold it a chief proof of kindness in their friends to pay them frequent visits. Before winter set in, it had come to be an established custom, the breach of which was considered a terrible grievance, that we should spend with her one or two afternoons in every week.

Nesta and my mother found these frequent visits a sad tax on their complaisance. I endured them much more patiently. Mrs. Armstrong's untidy drawing-room, littered as it always was with broken toys, torn lesson-books, and never-finished needlework, did not look as repulsive to me as I suppose it did to other people. I found myself unaccountably happy there. I could contentedly pass long rainy afternoons in listening to Mrs. Armstrong's monotonous complaints about her weak health and her dislike to living in London ; and the uselessness of her attempting to keep the children in any sort of order while George was away. Or I could, with still greater satisfaction, while away the long hours of winter twilight in keeping the children quiet with whispered fairy tales when Mrs. Armstrong slept on the sofa. I was proud of being the only person but one who had sufficient influence with these ill-trained children to induce them to pass an afternoon without quarrelling.

I did not take myself very seriously to task to discover why these apparently uninviting employments had such a charm for me : but I was far more scrupulous than Nesta and my mother in going away before I ceased to be wanted. It never happened to me that Mr. Armstrong returned from his chambers before I left the house, whereas they, who spent comparatively few afternoons there, were always meeting him, and seemed to receive more than their just share of his thanks and gratitude. It was certainly extremely unreasonable in me to envy them these thanks, seeing that I took such especial care never to be in the way of hearing them. If I were to be severe in chronicling my own changing moods at that time, I should have to convict myself of much unreasonableness and inconsistency ; but, seeing they were soon to pass away and leave no trace of the pain they gave, I will say nothing about them, but hasten on to the history of a day in my life to which all those misty days were slowly leading me up, little as I thought it,—a day that has coloured with its happiness the recollection of every one that came before, and the passing of every one that followed. It came unexpectedly, for we seldom know when a page in our book of life is going to be turned. The dark page is folded down over the bright one, and the golden-lettered leaf takes the place of the dark before we think we have half done reading the page.

I came down stairs on that January morning, I remember

with my day's work very carefully mapped out, and I thought I could have foretold quite certainly all that would happen to me before I went to bed. I was so busy, that I was a little annoyed when I was interrupted in my writing, by a note from Mrs. Armstrong, asking me to come and spend the day with her. She had a headache; the children were disposed to be unruly, and it was too cold to send them to spend their spirits out of doors. My mother wanted me to refuse the invitation. She thought the sky looked as if a fall of snow were impending, and she was vexed with Mrs. Armstrong for expecting me to brave weather to which she would not expose her own children. My father, who overheard our discussion, said that he thought this a foolish cause of offence. If I were really not afraid of the cold, and if Mrs. Armstrong wanted me, I had better go. I was glad he decided the matter for me. I had repented my exclamation of annoyance the instant after I had uttered it; and though I did not like to contradict myself, I should really have been much disappointed if I had had to send away Mrs. Armstrong's servant, and sit down to my desk again. So the first plan of my day was broken; but as I faced the north wind on my way to Mrs. Armstrong's house, I could just as easily have arranged a second. I again thought I saw how the hours would pass. I should, with more or less success, struggle through the morning lessons, then would come the tumultuous dinner-hour; then for an hour or so I should have to exert myself vigorously to invent amusements for the girls, and keep peace among the boys; in the twilight they would probably listen to a story, and by six o'clock I should be walking wearily home. Such was the usual routine of a day at the Armstrongs'; it was strange that I did not by any means dislike such days. The snow began to fall as I reached the house, and it continued to descend in large slow flakes all day. I think there is something exhilarating in a snow-storm; it always has a happy effect on my spirits, and I noticed that the children were all unusually amiable that morning. I tolerated a good deal of running backwards and forwards to the window to watch the snow during lessons; and we came to such a mutual good understanding in consequence, that I had my own way about choosing quiet amusements for the afternoon. Rather earlier than usual I persuaded them to pronounce it blind-man's holiday, and to

gather round the fire for a long story-telling. With a child on my knee, and a circle of eager young faces round me, I could always spin stories for an unlimited time. The little Armstrongs were good listeners, and my fame as a story teller had long been established among them. We were fairly embarked on the history of the "Fair One with Golden Locks," when a knock at the front door made me start so violently that little Mary Armstrong, who was sitting on my knees, complained that I nearly let her fall.

"What is the matter?" they all exclaimed. "Do go on, it is only George; he promised to come home early to-day, because it is Mary's birthday. But, of course, you will not interrupt the tale for him. He says you have often told him stories."

"Now has she not, George?" I heard little Mary say, who slipped out into the hall to welcome her brother. "Come in, do, and make Miss Scott go on."

I saw at once that there was no escape for me. The children received the new-comer with tumultuous joy into the fire-lit circle. Mary deserted my knee for his, and there was a little dispute about places, each of the children being anxious to be nearest him; but when every one was settled, there came a pause, and I had to go on with my tale—at first rather hesitatingly, but after a time I took courage. My new listener sat with his eyes rather moodily fixed on the fire; he did not seem to attend much to what I was saying. He stroked little Mary's hair every now and then gently with his hand, and always had a cheerful word when he was appealed to; but it struck me that he was too much occupied with thoughts of his own, to have much interest to spare for the Fair One's fortunes.

I got up once to go home, but was ordered decidedly to sit down again. It was not nearly six o'clock; I should have due notice when it was time to go; and, besides, I must wait till the snow ceased; so I had to ramble on till my stock of fairy lore was almost exhausted. Mr. Armstrong's attention must have been arrested by the last tales I told, for when the children, weary at length of sitting still, broke up the circle and dispersed to seek other amusements in the room, he surprised me by making a remark upon them.

"How can you remember so many strange stories?" he said, abruptly. "What charm have they for you? They seem

to me to be all very much alike. The one point of interest is the mystery. Your Fair Ones and your Princes are always changing their forms, and seeming something that they are not. I suppose they would not be interesting if they were always the same."

I don't know why the tone of this remark annoyed me, but it did, and I answered it with needless energy. "You have misunderstood my stories completely," I said. "Their charm to me and to the children, who are far wiser than you, does not lie in their mystery, nor in the changes, but in the constancy that survives all the transformations. My Fair Ones and Princes never change to each other. They may be beggars or queens, or fawns, or blue birds to the rest of the world, but to their friends they are always the same. That is why the children and I like them, is it not, little Mary?"

Little Mary at this instant ran up to me, and tried to draw my attention to a toy she held in her hand. Mr. Armstrong rather eagerly drew her back.

"No, not just now, little Mary; don't interrupt us just now." Then, turning to me—how grave the tone of his voice was!—"You must not put it into little Mary's head, or get it into your own," he said, "that only in fairy tales there can be people who are always the same to their friends. The difference between real life and fairy-land is, that in reality duties change, and that the expression of feeling may often have to be repressed by a loyal regard to what is most right. Can you not understand that?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well?"

"Little Mary wants me to look at her doll."

"Never mind little Mary, finish your sentence."

"Well, then, I do not think that duty can ever require such a change of conduct as to make real friends misunderstand or distrust each other. True friends will enter into each other's ideas of duty, if they are explained to them. They ought to be explained. You see it is I who do not approve of mysteries."

I was vexed to find the tears starting to my eyes as I finished. To hide them and prevent further conversation, I turned resolutely to Mary, and occupied myself with her and her doll till it was time for me to get ready to return home. Then I escaped from the room without taking leave of any

one. I longed to be at home again. I was angry with myself for having been betrayed into speaking so earnestly, for having been so ridiculously moved by my own words. I hardly dared to recollect what I had said. I must wait to take myself to task till I was alone at home.

When I came down stairs I found Mr. Armstrong waiting in the hall to walk home with me. He made me take his arm when we had got into the street. The snow had ceased falling, and the streets were white and noiseless as London streets only are for the first half-hour after a snow-storm. We walked on for some time in perfect silence. At length, to break the spell, and assure myself that I had full command of my voice, I ventured some commonplace remark on the strange silence of the streets. It was provoking that my voice should sound so shy and timid, as if I were speaking to a stranger instead of an old friend. What had come to me? I don't think Mr. Armstrong heard what I said; at all events, my remark received a very irrelevant reply.

"Janet," he said, suddenly, "I want you to explain what you said just now about friends understanding each other."

"I said all I had to say," I managed to gasp out.

"Then I must word my question differently. Janet, have you misunderstood me? Does it concern you to understand me? Give me just one word for answer, for if it does, you shall never have cause to make that complaint again. You shall know all my heart."

I don't think I said anything—perhaps my face spoke plainly enough. At all events, my silence was rightly interpreted.

After a short pause Mr. Armstrong went on. He had much to say, and how wonderful it was to me to hear it! Could it be all true?—or was I walking through the silent, snowy, lamp-lit streets in a dream? I heard the story of my life for the last three years told in a way that transfigured it for me. I had all that time been richer and happier than I knew; he had been interesting himself about me, watching me, approving me, blaming me, pitying me, at last loving me with a love that had become an inseparable part of his life, that underlaid, he said, every thought and every feeling, and entered into every project. He had always meant to tell me of it as soon as he thought I should care to hear; but he had gone on from month to month, fancying me too busy with

my work, too full of anxiety about my father and Nesta to have a thought to spare for him. Just before I left home in the summer, he had hoped that the time had come when he might speak, but he had been kept back from doing so by a doubt about his future prospects which then first began to trouble him. Difficulties had increased around him since then. Since his father's death, he had often thought that, having been silent so long, it had become his duty to be silent always. He could only now ask me to share a very uncertain and cloudy future. As long as he believed I did not care for him he had thought it right to withdraw himself gradually from me, only he had watched, hoping, he confessed, for some sign that I *did* care. His hope had nearly, very nearly, died out—my chance words that night had suddenly revived it. Was I prepared, he asked, at last, to face all the consequences of my words? Could I promise never to regret the explanation they had brought upon me?

I don't remember what I said in answer; it was not much. How could I say much, when my happiness was still so strange to me that I could not take it in? It satisfied him, however, and then the walk was over. We parted on the doorstep; I would not let him enter the house. I must be alone to think it all over, to try to realize it. I saw the door open, and the light from the hall showed me his face for a moment, radiant and tender, as I had never seen it before; then I watched him down the white street, and then the door shut behind me, and I thought I had awakened from a dream. No, it was not a dream, it was a reality—the great reality of my life that had come to me! How pale all the shadows with which I had loved to surround myself looked beside it!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“Blind! blind! blind!
Oh! sitting in the dark for evermore,
And doing nothing; putting out a hand
To feel what lies about me, and to say,
Not, ‘This is blue or red,’ but ‘this is cold;’
And ‘This the sun is shining on,’ and this
‘I know not till they tell its name to me.’”

JEAN INGELOW.

A MONTH passed, and my engagement with George Armstrong ceased to interest very much any one but ourselves. My

father and mother were quietly content with it, Nesta sympathized kindly in our happiness, Hilary wrote his congratulations on my good fortune in terms which almost satisfied me, and then there was nothing more to be said. It was our own affair that the fulfilment of our promise to each other was an event only to be looked at through a long vista of years. It did not dismay either of us that it should be so. We could thankfully take the great good which our engagement brought us, by giving us full understanding of and perfect trust in each other, and added opportunities of mutual help. What other good the coming years would bring we could wait for patiently, knowing that whatever troubles came upon us meanwhile, we should bear them together.

The very first weeks of our engagement brought us other things than our own happiness to think about. Nesta suffered much in health from the cold weather which set in after that December snow-storm. I had thought her looking unwell for some days, when one morning Hilary's usual weekly letter to our mother was accompanied by a Welsh county newspaper, addressed to me. I was engaged reading a letter to my father, and Nesta opened it first. She just glanced down a page, and put it aside. I did not notice any change in her countenance; all day long she seemed unusually busy, but I observed a feverish spot on each cheek and an unnatural brightness in her eyes that alarmed me. In the evening I re-collected the newspaper, and on examining it, found a passage which Hilary had marked with great red lines. It announced the approaching marriage of Miss Lester, heiress of Morfa Mawr, with Shafto Carr, Esq., nephew of the Earl of Denbigh. The newspaper informed its readers that Miss Lester was now travelling abroad with her future mother-in-law, Lady Helen Carr. In consequence of Mr. Lester's infirm state of health, the marriage was to be celebrated at Venice, and would take place in the spring. I, too, put the newspaper aside, without any remarks upon what I had read. I could not make up my mind whether to believe the report or not. It might be unfounded, and yet I felt sure Hilary would not have sent the newspaper to me unless he had seen reason to believe it true. I was anxious that Nesta should not ask my opinion, and she did not. She never made the slightest allusion to the Welsh news, and after some days I began to hope that the paragraph had escaped her observation. She did not appear at all more

unhappy than usual. She talked a little more, and seemed eager to take more than her share of every employment that chanced to be going on. We were surprised sometimes at the amount of work she got through in the day. After the frost set in, however, a change came over her; she took a slight cold, and was confined to her room for a few days, and the interruption in her usual habits produced an effect she seemed unable to overcome. An extreme languor and weariness took possession of her. Every day it appeared to be a greater effort to her to rise. She had no longer any interest in what was passing in the house. She would sit for hours and hours, doing nothing, listening to nothing: she no longer started when the postman's knock came at the door; her anxiety about letters was over at last. If, in the hope of rousing her, I mentioned Shafto's name, she would turn her head away languidly, wearily. Her face seldom showed any change of expression, only sometimes, when she had been sitting a long time quiet with her eyes closed, and thought no one was near, a tear would ooze slowly from under her transparent eyelids, and roll unheeded down her cheek. When we entreated her, for our sakes not to give way to her grief, she seemed surprised. She did not think, she said, that she *was* repining or cherishing useless regrets. She felt more resigned, less rebellious and impatient, than she had once been; she was only now so very tired.

The doctor, whom we had called in when she first fell ill, began to look grave when days and weeks passed and his remedies were of no avail. His patient was suffering from no illness that he could discover, he assured us; but there was an utter failure of strength that puzzled him. She seemed to be letting life slip away from her, from mere want of will to keep it. He talked of change of air and scene, and earnestly recommended that she should be removed to a warmer climate for the spring months. We were all distressed by these suggestions, because we knew how impossible it was for us to carry them into effect; but Nesta heard them with extreme impatience. "Don't let any one speak to me again about leaving England," she entreated, one day; "it is just *the* thing I cannot bear. I used to think so much about it a short time ago, I was always seeing the bright sunshine, and strange cities and scenery, and those three—moving about among them, laughing and talking and basking in the sun-

shine, so happy, while I was shut out—and it used to be such torture to me. Now I am quiet; I never wish to stir from here again. I have left all that old pain and struggle behind me; don't let any one bring it back. I only want you to leave me alone, and not take any notice of me." It was a hard task she imposed upon us, but she was right. I believe it was fortunate for her that we were not able to force any great change or exertion upon her just then. She had a quiet time, in which, unseen by us, a work of healing and renovation went on. Those hours of uneasiness and weakness were not lost. In her utter dejection and helplessness, feeling the failure and insufficiency of all earthly love, she threw herself on the only love in which the heart can ever find rest. When the torpor of grief had passed, she awoke to a higher spiritual life than she had ever known before. The change was very gradual, but we all felt it. Gentle, affectionate as ever, there was, after her recovery from that winter's tedious illness, a calm about her, a dignity that impressed every one who came near her with a wonderful sense of repose. She was no longer the timid girl who could be pained or frightened by a word of blame or a cold look; nor did she seem, as formerly, always trembling under the apprehension of some great possible calamity. Her gentle eyes had the steadfast expression of one who had looked so closely at sorrow and disappointment, that for her they had lost all their strangeness and terror. No one knew better than she from that time how to enter into every phase of another person's grief; no one ever more utterly laid aside all self-pitying reference to her own.

So strengthened and purified, Nesta rose above the shadow of her grief; but it is not often so. Many a nature is dwarfed and embittered for life by such an ordeal as she passed through; the frost of sorrow strikes so deep into the heart that it never has power to unfold itself rightly again in this world.

What a contrast there seemed at that time between Nesta's lot and my own! I remembered when she was a child she had *feared* to be better off than me—to have anything that I had not; and I was angry with myself sometimes, because in looking at my own secret source of joy, I could not help being happy.

Yet I wanted all the strength my inward content gave me; my father and mother looked solely to me now for support,

and if my spirits had failed, I don't know how we should have got through the dark days of that winter. Nesta was not the only invalid in the house. My father suffered much from increased pain and inflammation in his eyes. He had tried them severely during the autumn term, and had now to pay the penalty. He spoke more openly of his own sufferings and of his dread of losing his eyesight, than he had hitherto done, and my mother, shaken out of her false security, by his unwonted complaints, was overwhelmed with apprehension and self-reproach for past want of care. She and I changed places then, for I was disposed to be more hopeful than usual.

Comparing my father's account of his own sensations with the instructions Dr. Allison had left for our guidance, I even found encouragement to believe that his present symptoms were rather favourable than otherwise. George Armstrong agreed with me that they indicated the approach of a crisis in the disease, and after much persuasion, he prevailed on my father to consult an oculist to whom Dr. Allison had recommended him to have recourse, should his remedies fail. My mother, afraid of having her worst apprehensions confirmed, was disposed to encourage my father in putting off the consultation from week to week. I don't think the day for it would ever have been fixed had not George been very determined on carrying the point. He brought the doctor himself, rather unexpectedly, one morning, the very morning, I remember, on which we received a letter from Charlie, saying that he was to go in for his degree examination the following day. We had been discussing the tone of this letter so earnestly during breakfast, that the prospect of the doctor's visit had passed out of our minds.

As we were leaving the breakfast table, George came in to say that Dr. M—— was in the drawing-room, waiting to see my father. He got up, and followed George without a word; but when he reached the door, he turned, and stood for a moment, looking back at the room and at us. He had been able to see more distinctly since the pain in his eyes had returned, and there was just then a soft ray of winter sunshine streaming through the window upon my mother's face and figure as she sat at the head of the table. It was a distinct and not unpleasant picture that he took in then, of us, and of the scene of our old family life, one, he says, that it is not painful to keep and look at inwardly. My mother became

very faint as she listened to my father's step mounting the stairs. In a few minutes we should know the worst, but the few minutes were like hours.

At last the drawing-room door opened, and we heard Mr. Armstrong and Dr. M—— coming down stairs ; they were talking, and the first tone of George's voice re-assured me. I knew at once that he could not be bringing us the worst news. Dr. M—— came himself to speak to my mother ; he approved of Dr. Allison's treatment, but thought the case ought to have been more closely watched. It might be that a favourable change was taking place, and with that hope he had determined on trying certain powerful remedies, which had been known to succeed in worse cases. He warned us against being too sanguine, but he seemed equally anxious that my father should have enough hope to make him willing to give the treatment a fair trial. Dr. M—— said my father must submit to be very quiet, and sit constantly in a darkened room for many weeks, and he instructed us to do our utmost to keep him amused, and as free as possible from anxiety of mind.

I readily promised everything. It was so delightful to me to have again even a faint hope of my father's recovery, that I was disposed to put the best possible construction on each of the doctor's kind words.

My mother was easily persuaded to think as I did. Even my father listened with more belief than I had expected to my joyful anticipations ; he would not allow in so many words that he expected any great good to come from the new treatment, but he submitted without a murmur to do all Dr. M—— required, and was sometimes even the first to remember his cautions. As he and I sat together for the next four days in the darkened drawing-room, I fell into a more hopeful way of speaking to him about the future than I should have ventured upon a few months, or even two years ago.

I planned that Charlie should take a sufficiently high honour to justify the trustees of the school in appointing him my father's substitute for a year or so. During that time, I said, my father would be gradually recovering his eyesight, till at length he should be able to resume his old position, and set Charlie free to follow some more congenial occupation. Once or twice I went so far as to map out the successful

future of Charlie's life, which was to compensate him for the sacrifice of those two first years.

As one day after another passed in this kind of talk, I sometimes asked myself whether I was not rather exceeding Dr. M——'s instructions. My father grew restless, and watched the alternations of his symptoms with feverish anxiety. I began to think I had not taken the best means of securing calm of mind when I persuaded him to exchange the patient endurance to which he had been long accustomed for an uncertain hope. George comforted me by observing that, since this week of Charlie's examination must be an anxious time, it might be well to divert my father's thoughts from wondering hour by hour how Charlie was faring at Cambridge.

About a fortnight passed in this way. My father did not seem to make progress, and he suffered much; he began to worry about having to neglect his work in the school, and one or two complaints of mismanagement reached him, and increased his trouble. My mother and I counted the days that must elapse before Charlie could arrive in London, and I wrote to ask him to come to us as soon as possible, knowing how much his presence would cheer my father. I was disappointed that he did not return home as soon as the examination was over, without waiting till the degrees were given, but I comforted myself by reflecting that it was like Charlie to wish to bring the news of his own triumph. I thought his determination to stay till the last, indicated that he anticipated a great success.

At length a letter came from Charlie. How strangely my heart sank when it was put into my hand! I had no reason for feeling alarmed. It might just as well have been good news as bad, and yet, somehow, I knew that it was bad as soon as my fingers touched the thin envelope, and my pale face frightened my mother and Nesta, before my swimming eyes would let me read:—

"DEAR JANET,"—(The words grew at last clear to me), "I enclose the class-list, where my name is not; that means I am plucked. My father will hardly believe unless he sees; I am not sure that I do; but I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence. I am utterly sick of it all.

"CHARLIE."

"P.S. Don't expect me till you see me. I cannot face my father yet."

That was all. There was no class-list in the envelope—the poor boy had forgotten to put it in ; and the paper on which these words were scrawled was blotted and crumpled as if it had been once crushed together in his hand. It pained me to see this, but it was the postscript of the letter that grieved my mother most, far more than the news itself. If he had come home to her in his humiliation and trouble, she would have been so full of the thought of excusing and consoling him that she would have had no room in her heart for any other. My father's first words were (he was silent for some time after I read the letter to him)—“When can he be here?” and he made me sit down at once and write at his dictation a kind letter, entreating him to come. It was almost too kind a letter, I thought as I wrote (being much troubled all the time to keep my eyes free enough from tears for my task); its tenderness and generosity would almost have broken my heart if I had received it from any one I had disappointed as deeply as Charlie had disappointed my father. I wondered how he would feel as he read. Surely he would come at once, and not be above showing us the remorse he must be feeling. My father wanted my mother to add a postscript, but she was disinclined to do so. She resented the tone of Charlie's letter more than my father did.

He might have acknowledged that he was sorry, she said ; and it was so wrong of him not to come home. Hilary would never have acted so. She promised not to scold him when he came, but she said she would always feel hurt about it.

When I returned from posting the letter, I found my father indisposed for conversation. He sat very still all day, hardly moving or speaking. He made me read aloud to him, and prevailed on me to undo a fold of the shutter that I might see without straining my eyes. It was a sunny day, but though I had many qualms of conscience about disobeying Dr. M——'s express orders, I thought it better to run some risk than to force my father to sit unoccupied, revolving sad thoughts in his mind. We spent the next and the three following days in expecting Charlie. We thought every knock at the door was his, we watched every post in the hope that it would bring a letter. During those days I read diligently hour after hour to my father. It was some volume

of early ecclesiastical history we were engaged upon. When by chance I hear the name of one of the bishops or saints whose lives we read then, something of the wretched, bewildered feeling of that time comes back to me. I used to place my father's chair as far as possible from the dusty stream of sunshine I was obliged to let in upon my book ; but I could never make his corner as dark as I wished. Those were such dreadfully sunny days ; I have never known February days so unnecessarily bright since then. My father sat always with his eyes wide open and fixed, and a frown of intense attention on his forehead. It saddened me more than any expression of pain I had ever seen on any face, for it showed how much he feared to let his thoughts follow their own course an instant. I did not myself share his extreme uneasiness at Charlie's non-appearance. I thought it very like Charlie to put off writing or coming as long as possible. It would cost him an effort to do either. It was like him to let hours and days slip on unheeded, while he was gathering up courage to make it.

At the end of a week, two letters from Cambridge—one having been misdirected, and so delayed a day—reached us together. They were in a strange hand, and proved to be from a college friend of Charlie's. The first, written with an evident wish not to alarm, informed us that Charlie had been for some days very unwell. Within the last twelve hours, the writer of the letter said, his illness had taken a more serious form. He had persuaded Charlie to send for a doctor, and after hearing the opinion of the medical man, he thought it right to inform Charlie's friends of his state. He was suffering much pain in his head, and the doctor seemed to apprehend an attack of brain fever. The next letter was short and urgent. Charlie was alarmingly ill ; he did not know any one round him ; he imagined himself at home and asked incessantly for his father, whom he believed to be at hand, but unwilling to see him. The doctor attending him thought it important that some of his friends should come to him as soon as possible. The writer urged Mr. Scott to set off immediately on receipt of the letter. He was doing all he could for his friend, he said, but he felt his care insufficient, and was anxious to resign his charge into better hands.

My mother always showed admirable presence of mind when she was called upon to act in a sudden emergency.

In the presence of illness or trouble, her ordinary indecision and over-care about trifles left her at once. She showed more resolution on that sad morning than Nesta and I did. Before I had finished reading the letters she had determined what to do. She and Mr. Armstrong must start immediately for Cambridge, and she decided that my father must be persuaded to stay at home. He would be of little use in nursing, and it would be a terrible risk for him to take such a journey now. I knew that it would not be a risk at all; it would be a certain throwing away of his last chance of saving his eyesight, and yet I felt little hope that we should succeed in keeping him at home. George came in while we were still discussing which of us should undertake the task of breaking the news to our father. He agreed with my mother in thinking that my father must be persuaded, almost compelled, to stay at home; and seeing how very much I dreaded reading these letters to him, he took the task upon himself, and went alone to the drawing-room. He was the right person to do it; no one could be so firm, and at the same time so kind as he. My mother and Nesta went up stairs to prepare for the hasty journey. I lingered with a beating heart outside the drawing-room door, anxious to catch some tone of my father's voice which might show me how he bore the news. I feared so much that he would resent our effort to keep him from Charlie, that I was as much surprised as relieved when George came out of the room with a satisfied face, and said, "He bears it much better than I expected, he has promised me that he will not run any risk. He wants you to go to him now. You need not be afraid; he is wonderfully calm."

Somehow, this last assurance *made* me afraid, and the eager, rather excited tone in which my father called to me the instant I opened the door, did not re-assure me.

"Janet, come here," he said. "What sort of a morning is it?"

"A bright sunny morning," I answered.

"Then, dear, you must do something for me. Open all the shutters quite wide, and let in the sunshine."

I hesitated a little, and then, understanding suddenly the motive of his request, I walked across the room and let in the full light of a sunshiny spring morning.

"Are the shutters open?" my father asked.

"Yes, wide open," I answered, tremblingly.

Putting his hands before him with an uncertain movement I had never seen before, my father walked forward till he stood opposite the window. The light fell full upon his wide-opened eyes, and I felt sure, from their fixed, unshrinking expression, that they were now entirely sightless.

"Come and stand between me and the light, Jenny."

I obeyed.

"You are there?"

"Yes, close to you, dearest papa," I said.

He put out his hand, but did not at first succeed in placing it on my head.

"Yes, you are there; but, Janet, my child, I cannot see you. It is as I expected—I am *quite* blind. I cannot even see the light. I have suspected for the last week that it would be so; now I know. God's will be done!"

I came close to him, and threw my arms round his neck, and we stood for a minute or two silent together. He had often told me that it would be to him the hardest trial of all to give up the last glimmer of light. He prized such dim vision as he had lately had far more than most people do their perfect sight. The prospect of changing that for total darkness had been very terrible to him. The dreaded moment had come now, and he met it with a calm, almost triumphant smile on his face.

"We have no time to lose, Janet," he said. "You see it will be *no risk*. Nothing can change my lot now. I am thankful that it is so, for now I may go to Charlie. It would not have been right to go if there had been a lingering hope left. How strange that I should be able to say, I am glad there is not! You had better tell your mother and Nesta the whole truth; it will set their minds at rest. All our thoughts may now be given to Charlie. I need never be an anxiety to you again. You know the worst. What a blessing! Yes, I am in earnest, Janet. A great calm comes when a long uncertain hope is fairly given up. That knowledge has come to me this morning. Now go, darling; your mother must not be delayed a moment by my resolution to accompany her. See what arrangements can be made for my journey. I don't think I need be a trouble to any one. I shall not be much more helpless than I used to be, and George knows how to take care of me."

Something of the calmness of which my father spoke fell upon me as I listened to him and looked at his face. The moment so long dreaded had come, and it had not proved terrible. Instead of sinking, my heart grew lighter. I felt as if it would be presumptuous ever to dread anything for him again, or for ourselves, while he was left to show us how to bear whatever came.

I had some difficulty in reconciling my mother to my father's taking the journey. She could not bring herself to acknowledge that hope for him was indeed over. Her mind refused to take in at once two such calamities as this morning had brought us. However, the necessity for exertion helped her to keep calm. There was not much time for discussion. My father would not allow the journey to be delayed a moment longer than was absolutely necessary. In less than two hours after that morning's post came in, Nesta and I found ourselves for the first time alone in the house. How very, very long the rest of that day seemed! How strangely empty the house looked without my mother's figure moving about it! We should have felt still more depressed if we had known that sudden departure was a final one; that the old life in the home of our childhood had come to an end that day.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Star after star arose and fell, but I
Lay sundered from the moving Universe;
Nor knew what eye was on me, nor the hand
That nursed me, more than infants in their sleep."

TENNYSON'S *Princess*.

THE first gleam of comfort that came to Nesta and me was the return of George Armstrong in the evening, bringing us news of Charlie and of our father and mother. It was a great relief to hear that my mother's courage had not given way, and that my father had continued calm during the journey.

George had accompanied them to Charlie's rooms in the

college, and seen them established there. He had not been allowed to see Charlie, but he had spoken to his friend and to the physician who was attending him. The doctor had arrived for his second daily visit just as George was leaving, and had seemed much relieved to find my father and mother with his patient. Since the fever became violent, Charlie's wandering mind had fixed itself on the idea that he was deserted by all his friends, especially by his father, whom he believed himself to have offended or injured in some way. The doctor hoped that the sight of familiar faces would have a calming effect on his mind.

It interested me to learn from George that the friend who had written to us, and who had been very constant in his attention to Charlie since his illness began, was a certain cousin of Richard Moorsom's, whom Charlie, in his giddy days, had been much disposed to ridicule. He had written an account of Charlie's illness to his friends at Deepdale, and on that morning Mr. Moorsom had arrived at Cambridge to see if he could be of any use in looking after the invalid. My father and mother had found him in Charlie's room, and they seemed, George thought, to have made a friend of him at once. George had heard him say that he should not leave Cambridge till Charlie was out of danger. I could not help looking at Nesta as he said this, but she did not seem to hear. Once the mention of Richard Moorsom's name would have moved her, if it were only that it brought back the recollection of our summer at Broadlands. Now she heard it with as much indifference as if it were an utterly strange name; and he, good faithful heart, was nursing Charlie, and devoting himself to our father and mother for her sake.

Now again, for some weeks, the entire interest of our days centred in the arrival of the morning and afternoon posts, which never failed to bring us a few lines from my mother. As they were hopeful or desponding, our days were sad or cheerful.

"At last Charlie has fallen asleep," she wrote, the fourth day after she left us, "and I may take a large sheet of paper, and give you a fuller account than I have yet done. It is a great blessing that your father came. If dear Charlie is spared, I shall always say that his coming saved his life. He is never quiet—never for one instant—unless your father is near. Your father is sitting by his bedside now, holding his

hand while he sleeps. He does not know me, poor fellow, and I don't think he even quite knows his father; but then your father's voice has a power of calming him that nothing else has. He seems to have a dim idea that it is some one he ought to obey, and that by doing as he is told, he shall please his father, whom he still will believe to be far away, and very angry with him. It is sad to hear him, poor boy. Sometimes he sings songs and talks as if he were in gay company, and then a sort of horror comes over him, and he says terrible things about himself. He must have been very unhappy for a long time. To please your father and gratify Richard Moorsom—who, I must tell you, is as attentive as a son to us—I have been lying down for a little time on the sofa in Charlie's sitting-room. I could not sleep, so I soon got up and began to try to set the room in order. It disheartened me sadly to see what a state it was in. I am sure, poor fellow, no wonder he could not study while his room was in such terrible confusion. Books and clothes and papers, and all sorts of strange-looking things heaped up together on every chair. Many of the letters on the table are unopened; I am afraid most of them look like bills. I dare not begin to examine them. I have collected them all, and put them in a drawer. I will let you know by the morning post how Charlie is when he wakes. He has never been quiet for so long yet."

The next reports were not favourable. Charlie had an increase of fever, which was followed by another still longer interval of stupor. Life or death hung on how he would wake from that death-like sleep.

In the short notes my mother wrote on those heavy days were one or two allusions to my father, which showed me that her mind was only gradually awaking to a knowledge of his actual condition. "Your father seems better," she wrote, "and has never once complained of pain in his eyes since he left London. I had a terrible fright yesterday. I had moved a table, with some medicine bottles and glasses on it, from Charlie's bedside to the middle of the room, and your father, coming in from the outer room, stumbled and nearly fell down over it. Mr. Moorsom happened to be near and caught him, or he would have had a very bad fall. The room was quite light at the time. I had just opened one of the windows. I don't think such a thing ever happened to your father before, and

I confess it was a great shock to me. He has been so helpful hitherto, that I really did not know he was in any danger. Now I shall never have peace of mind when he is out of my sight. Ah, dear girls, how thankless we are all our lives for common blessings! It seems to me now that if your dear father could but have his eyesight like other people, and if Charlie were spared to us, I could never worry myself about trifles again. Yet I used to do this. I even allowed trifling household cares to occupy me so much, that I did not notice your father's state of health as much as I might have done. Janet, you have nothing to reproach yourself with—you have always been careful over your father. It is curious that you, who were always called the thoughtless one of the family, you whom I used to say I could not trust with the smallest charge, should, in this great matter, have shown yourself the most trustworthy of us all—you and George. Give my love to George, and tell him that I have never been half grateful enough for his kindness to your father. Mr. Moorsom is also very kind. He walks out with your father every day. I wish I had more time to talk to him. He must find it dreary work, sitting hour after hour in the outer room waiting to see if there is anything to be done for us, while we are with Charlie. How fond he must have been of Charlie, to take this trouble for him!"

At length, on the second of April, the first really spring-like day that year, a day of soft sunshine and gentle showers, came a hopeful happy letter. The relief it brought showed us how terrible had been our fears. The first sentences were almost incoherent in their joy; then my mother sobered down into her usual style of minute narrative:—

"It was at nine o'clock this morning," she wrote, "that Charlie awoke from his long sleep, and now it is four. I am sorry to think that you will have to be unhappy a whole day longer than I am. Your father and I are so happy!—your father even more than I. I shall never forget how he looked when Charlie put out his hand and called him. 'Is that you, father? is that really you?' His voice was very weak, and he tried to raise himself from the pillow, but could not. Your father came to sit upon the bed, and put his arm round Charlie and kissed him, and then Charlie lay back quietly, and looked at your father as if it were a wonder and satisfaction to him that he should be there. Since morning he has had several

intervals of troubled sleep. On first waking, he has once or twice seemed frightened, as if he did not know where he was or what had happened ; but the sight of your father's face always calmed him immediately. His doctor, who has called twice to-day, says that it is a most Providential thing that your father was able to come. He thinks it has saved Charlie's life."

At the end of a fortnight Charlie was well enough to be moved into the outer room. We were beginning to think we should soon have him at home again, when we heard that he had been thrown back into a state of extreme depression and weakness by the shock he felt when the knowledge of our father's total loss of sight first came upon him. My mother had been extremely anxious to withdraw his attention from my father's condition, and Charlie had been too full of his own feelings to be a very careful observer. But, on the third day of his leaving his bedroom, a slight accident revealed the truth to him. He had been more unprepared for it than we, and he took it more to heart. It preyed upon his mind, adding to his already deep remorse, and seriously retarding his recovery. It was pitiful, my mother wrote, to see how Charlie used to lie on his sofa, watching my father fixedly hour after hour, and how every gesture or movement that betrayed his blindness deepened the expression of pain on Charlie's face. My father never knew anything of these sad looks ; he used to go on talking cheerfully, boasting perhaps a little each day of some new power of helpfulness that he had gained, while Charlie looked on and listened, without ever venturing on a word of condolence or sympathy. He never asked a single question, or heard how the change in my father had come about. He seemed to prefer gathering his knowledge little by little, as the events of the day brought the painful truth before him. He told me afterwards that he felt it would be a mere mockery in him to speak of his sorrow, or to offer sympathy which by his own folly he had rendered unavailing. He had cast away the chance of giving substantial help to our father in his affliction, and he could not ask him to accept empty words. It was best to bear the weight of his own remorse and pain in silence.

I thought it a sign of a hopeful change in Charlie's character that he did not, as he would once have done, exhaust all his penitence in words ; that he allowed it to remain

unexpressed in his heart, till the fruits of an altered life could testify to its sincerity.

When my mother had less to tell us about Charlie—for one day very much resembled another in his tedious recovery—her letters began to be full of Mr. Moorsom's sayings and doings. I was alarmed when I saw how completely his attentions to our father had won my mother's heart, for I could not help guessing the direction her hopes were taking. I feared, too, from little admissions that escaped her, that she had allowed Mr. Moorsom's evident interest to tempt her to speak more freely about our home concerns than was quite advisable. Prescriptions for medicines of all kinds came from Lady Moorsom to Nesta, and I felt tolerably sure that with an account of her failing health, my mother had also given the entire history of her engagement and rupture with Shafto Carr, and that it was by this time known to every member of the Moorsom family. I was sorry, but I dared not remonstrate, for I knew that my letters were always read aloud by my mother to my father as soon as they arrived, and Mr. Moorsom was just as likely as not to be one of the audience.

By the end of April, change of air was recommended for Charlie. He was not strong enough to bear a long journey, and my father seemed to have a sort of shrinking from returning home. So when Richard Moorsom proposed that they should all visit Deepdale, the invitation was gladly accepted.

Charlie's spirits improved from the day they left Cambridge, and my mother was able to give us brilliant accounts of the happy manner in which their days at Deepdale passed; she enjoying the sweet country scenes; and the sight of Charlie's daily progress to recovery, though there were times, she said, when many anxious thoughts about the future would come over her. My father did not seem to be in the least anxious, and was quite at home in the society of his kind-hearted host. He walked about the fields leaning on Sir John's arm, listening to his agricultural talk, and astonishing him by bringing out, at every pause, curious information respecting ancient methods of farming, which gave Sir John an opportunity of chuckling over the superiority of his own, and raised his admiration for his guest's learning to the highest possible degree. Lady Moorsom had ample and

delightful occupation in doctoring Charlie, and managing my mother. I gathered that the chief topics of their discourse, when housekeeping interests failed, were the bad qualities inherent in the Carr family, and the merits of Lady Moorsom's son Richard. I could see plainly that my mother had readily adopted her hostess's opinion on both these subjects.

When they had been a week at Deepdale, I received a letter dictated by my father, which explained to me why he had preferred visiting Deepdale to returning home.

By the same post that brought my letter, he had, he told me, written to the trustees, to resign his headmastership of the school. He thought it right that this necessary step should be taken at once, and he felt he could do it most easily while he was away from the scene of his old labours. All hope of Charlie's appointment was at an end; but, my father assured me that, now the time had come when he must give up his only means of providing for his family, he felt far less anxious than he had done while he was struggling to keep it. He hoped we should all experience the same calm, and be content to go on with him step by step, satisfied if we could see what to do from one day to another, and able to leave the rest. He had clearly thought out and arranged the first measures which it seemed prudent to take in our new circumstances. We must give up our house in London, sell his beloved books, and as much of the furniture as it was not absolutely necessary to keep, and go to live in some inexpensive country place, where our stock of ready money would last till some new plan of life opened out for us.

What a long, anxious discussion George and Nesta and I had over that letter! At first, the thought of breaking up the old home seemed dreadful to me. I tried all I could to convince myself that it was not necessary. Could not I do something to earn an income which would make it possible for us to go on living as we had hitherto done? I was forming a hundred plans, when I had to resign them all in favour of one suggested by Hilary, which was far too rational and pleasant to the other members of the family for me to think of objecting to it.

Hilary's plan was, that we should all go to live with him at Morfa Bach. The house was large enough to hold us, he said, and his income would suffice to keep us all in comfort;

so our removal from London was decided upon in a very few days.

I never quite knew what my father's feelings were about going to live at Morfa. I should once have supposed that to live there would be the thing of all others most distasteful to him. If it did cause him any special grief, no word ever betrayed it to any one. He approved of Hilary's plan as the wisest we could follow, and was full of grateful affection to him for suggesting it.

The only evidence he gave of the pain it cost him to separate himself from his old friends, and his old way of life was, that he chose to stay at Deepdale till Hilary was ready to receive him at Morfa, and thus escaped taking a formal leave of the home he had to give up.

To the great surprise of Nesta and myself, my mother would not leave my father and Charlie, though there was something said at one time about my going to Deepdale, and setting her free to return home and superintend the packing of such of our household goods as were to follow us to Morfa. That my mother should trust such a work to me, would at one time have seemed almost incredible. She did so, however, and I gathered from this fact, that the days of my father's dependence on me were entirely over. She had taken her right place as his chief watcher now, and I should no longer be wanted.

On the very last night in the old house, when George and I sat for the last time in the dismantled study, with the evidence of our day's packing heaped up round us, we had a conversation over this new state of things, which did me good. George showed me that I must be content now to fill a less important place to my father than I had hitherto done, and he warned me not to embitter the comfort that had come to him in his sorrow by any petty jealousy or exacting of gratitude. I must not make the others feel now, when they were all longing to serve him, that my past care had given me a better right than they had to help him. In family life there was sometimes such a thing as a generous withdrawal from service, in order to give others, who were longing to serve, their place. I must learn to practise that duty now.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Autumn hath violets as well as Spring,
And age its sweetness hath as well as youth."

MARY MAYNARD.

AFTER leaving our house, Nesta and I spent a few weeks in visits to old friends, and were the last of the home-party to arrive at Morfa. My mother had had time to receive and unpack all the furniture we had despatched from London, and to give such a different aspect to the once comfortless rooms of the farm-house, that I scarcely recognised them. The dark, low-ceilinged "keeping-room," which I had thought too ugly for anything but a rubbish-place, had changed, in my mother's hands, into a pleasant parlour. Our ancient worked chairs, and spindle-legged tables and couches, which had looked shabby and old-fashioned in our London drawing-room, fitted into its odd nooks and corners as if they had been made for them; while our mother's beloved old china jars and cups, which had always in London been doomed to the seclusion of a dark closet, found here safe standing-room on the curious shelves and recesses of the oak mantel-piece. My father decided on taking the octagon room for his study, because the space between two of the windows afforded him a walk of precisely the same length as that to which he had been accustomed in the old den. His meditations were, alas! in no danger of being disturbed by the contrast between the view from these windows and his former out-look on the dingy stable-wall. Hilary nailed up one of the superfluous doors and filled the recess with book-shelves, where Charlie arranged a few favourite books which George and I had taken it upon ourselves to keep back from the sale. My father found amusement for many a rainy day in learning to know by touch the exact position of each dearly-prized volume, and in practising himself in opening them at the passages he best liked to have read aloud to him. Before we had been at Morfa a month, no one ever thought of asking for a missing book of any one but my father.

I believe I felt the change from the old house more than any one else. My London letters, regularly as they came, did not make up for the daily intercourse which had become

so precious to me, and I was sometimes tempted to think that the other members of the family betrayed strange coldness of heart in accommodating themselves so easily to the loss of old friends. My father would indeed say sometimes, on returning from a walk, that he wished George could have taken it with him; but the wish was not a very earnest one, for I could not help seeing that, as long as he could have my mother's arm to lean upon, he did not really want any one else. My mother was his usual companion in his rambles, and, as the summer advanced, these rambles were so prolonged, that they sometimes occupied the entire morning or the long afternoon. My mother abandoned household business to Nesta when she discovered that the only chance of keeping my father out long in the open air was that she should be with him. By her good management it came to be his chief pleasure to be out of doors. I don't think he had ever cared much for scenery in his youth, and certainly he had never loved Morfa mountains and valleys. It was curious to observe how, seeing everything now through my mother's eyes, a new appreciation of natural beauty grew up in him. He used to come in of an evening, radiant with pleasure, to tell me how beautiful the sunset had been, how fresh the upland pastures looked after last night's rain, how the great purple beeches in the Morfa Mawr gardens were deepening in colour as the year grew older, how rich the gorse looked in the stony hollows of the hills; and he said all this without the least effort or exaggeration of his own enjoyment. He really did derive more pleasure from hearing these sights described by my mother than any vision of his own had ever given him. Perhaps he had never in his life known how to see till she taught him. She had never lost her early delight in nature. A vision of the changes which spring and summer and autumn were working in the Morfa woods and fields, lived with her through every year of her confinement to dusty London streets, and square gardens. He had never hitherto sympathized in her love for her native place; its intensity had been a barrier between them; he had wondered and grieved over a regret which he had always felt somehow or other to be a reproach to himself. Now at last the secret of her love grew clear to him. Her words called up images of beauty and peace which the scenes themselves had never given him. It was as if he had gained instead of lost a sense.

It became a constant source of wonder and amusement to the few people who visited our house to hear the way in which our father spoke of the country operations that were going on around him. We used to be asked over and over again if it was really true that he was blind. Hilary himself would sometimes appeal to him for information as to what was doing in such a field, or whose flock was feeding on such a hill. How happy my mother used to look when my father answered rightly! Her old timidity and silence, when in my father's company, had vanished entirely now. We young ones, when we saw them coming back from a walk together, still talking, used to wonder what they could have found so interesting to say to each other. They were both of them younger than we their children were, for they were freer from anxious thoughts and worldly care; and the full understanding of each other, which untoward circumstances had hitherto hindered, had come at last.

We young ones should have been ungrateful indeed if seeing them so happy had not helped us to bear our own share of trouble. Our two invalids, Nesta and Charlie, gained health and strength during the bright days of that tranquil summer. Charlie took to reading diligently as soon as his health permitted him to use any exertion—so diligently, indeed, that Nesta had to be always on the watch to prevent him from injuring himself by over work. He was very much changed. Every little fatigue now brought back a return of distress and pain in his head. He had nothing left of his old eagerness and pleasure in learning. The work which once might have been done so easily had now to be struggled through under a constant penalty of pain. But there were other better changes. Charlie might never again be as bright and clever as he used to be, but we all felt how much more humble and patient he had grown. We could all admire the courage with which he set himself to repair his past faults.

Nesta had ample occupation in looking after Charlie and managing the household. Mrs. Morgan took care that this last should not be an easy task. By what miracle Nesta reduced her to order remained unknown to us. Mrs. Morgan certainly did not resign her power without a struggle. She tried every phase of ill-temper to weary Miss Ernestine into leaving her to her own devices. When, however, she found that nothing she could say or do ruffled Nesta's quiet dignity,

she suddenly changed her tactics, and determined that, since she could not be mistress, she would at least be prime minister. She grew fond of talking of "me and Miss Ernestine," and of astonishing the thriftless farmers' wives of the neighbourhood with an account of their domestic achievements.

After conquering Mrs. Morgan, there seemed to be nothing that Nesta could not do. Always gentle, always quietly busy, always ready to interest herself in the business of every one who needed help, her influence gradually widened its sphere, till there was hardly a poor cot or lonely farm-house in the neighbourhood where it was not felt.

The summer passed without our hearing any news of Rosamond Lester. She was still abroad with Lady Helen. Three or four times we were agitated with the news that the whole party—Lady Helen, Mr. Carr, and Rosamond—were expected at Morfa Mawr ; but we were sure to hear the next week that a letter, indefinitely postponing their arrival, had been received. Hilary said at last that he would never again believe that they were coming. On the whole, there was less communication between the farm and the Great House than formerly. Mr. Lester remained in the state of health into which he had fallen a year before—neither much better nor worse. On very good days he was brought down into his library, where he would sometimes see Hilary, and listen, with nearly his old eagerness, to details respecting the management of the estate. With great effort, he could pronounce a few words, which were intelligible to those accustomed to hear him speak ; but he was apt to become very irritable when he was not understood at once, and on that account his doctor and nurse forbade him to see strangers. My mother paid one visit to the sick room, but Mr. Lester showed such painful excitement while she was with him, and suffered so much for days after the interview, that it was not considered advisable to repeat it. My father, though equally unwelcome at first, thought it right to persevere. He went sometimes with Hilary and sometimes alone, and after a time he was able to hope that Mr. Lester derived some comfort from his visits.

If I had not known how useless it was to dissuade my father from doing anything that he considered a duty, I should have tried to keep him away from Morfa Mawr ; for it was

only after seeing Mr. Lester that he ever seemed unhappy. The Great House had still, I feared, the power of casting a shadow over us all. Hilary was always cross after being there, whatever might have been his errand. My mother was depressed by the contrast between present and past times, and Nesta always returned from an hour's conversation with Mrs. Western a little graver than usual. The good old lady's talk was not calculated to raise her spirits, for it usually turned on Rosamond Lester, and on the satisfaction we all ought to feel at her consenting to the marriage which her grandfather had planned so long ago. I tried to persuade Nesta to let me take her share of our periodical visits to the hall, but Mrs. Western, like every one else, was fond of Nesta, and Nesta was too kind to pain her by keeping away. "My turn only comes once a week," she used to say when I begged her to let me take her place. "It is a very small sacrifice to make. Besides, it ought not to be a sacrifice at all. It is best to get used to seeing the house and hearing of it before it is all over and I have to see other faces there."

The first event that broke the monotony of our lives at Morfa Bach, was the arrival of a letter from Richard Moorsom, announcing his intention of paying us a visit. The letter came at the beginning of harvest time, and Hilary was a little annoyed at having the interruption of a visitor just then. Nesta and Charlie joined him in his inhospitable grumbling, while my mother looked so guilty, that I suspected she had known of the visit before, perhaps planned it with Lady Moorsom while she was at Deepdale.

Indisposed as we had been to welcome him, Mr. Moorsom's coming brought more gaiety among us than we had known for many a day. Charlie and I were obliged to acknowledge that we had not known before what a pleasant companion he could be, and also, that in order thoroughly to enjoy a visitor, one must have been shut up for three months in a place as remote from the civilized world as Morfa Bach farm. Hilary and he took to each other at once, and would have talked of farming the entire day, if my father, Charlie, and I, had not secured a share of the conversation to ourselves, by making laws about the length of time during which it was allowable to discuss an agricultural topic, and the number of remarks relating to the farm which might fairly be insinuated during the evening. Hilary was always transgressing, and Charlie

was always making us laugh, by insisting on seeing covert allusions to the forbidden topics in every word he uttered.

My father did not get much reading from either Charlie or me on the evenings of the week Mr. Moorsom stayed, nor, indeed, during the last few mornings; for after spending two days in walking about the country with Hilary. Mr. Moorsom discovered that he had sprained his ankle, and must for the future confine himself to the nearer views. We did not like to throw the trouble of entertaining him entirely on my mother and Nesta, so we gave ourselves a holiday, and generally all went out together, and spent the bright August days in watching the harvest work, or following the gleaners about the fields.

My mother was the only person with whom Mr. Moorsom seemed to care to have private conferences, and when Nesta saw she was not troubled with more than her fair share of attention, the slight constraint that had at first marked her manner, wore off. I really believe that I suffered more embarrassment than she did, and certainly all the ungracious acts fell to my share. It was always I who had to give cautionary glances, when my father and Hilary were disposed to press our guest to prolong his stay at Morfa, and I had to be constantly making myself disagreeable, by interrupting conversations between my mother and Mr. Moorsom when I suspected that she was growing too confidential and encouraging.

During the week of Mr. Moorsom's visit, we all chanced to be too busy to pay our usual visits to the hall. On Saturday morning my mother bethought herself of the omission, and reproached us for our negligence.

"How unkind Mrs. Western must have thought us," she observed; "we ought to have remembered that she was as lonely as ever, while we were amusing ourselves more than usual."

Hilary was just leaving the room when my mother spoke; he stopped, and turned round, to mutter something not very intelligible, about my mother's compassion being quite thrown away. Mrs. Western had not wanted us as much as we imagined. It was his opinion that the less we all went up to the hall for the future the better.

Hilary had been silent and glum all breakfast-time, but as he could every now and then make an ungracious speech, we

none of us attached any particular meaning to this one. We concluded that some Owen or Morgan about the farm had taken advantage of harvest-time to be more aggravating than usual, and that the master's temper suffered in consequence.

My mother sighed, and wished that poor Hilary had not to work so hard, but decided at once, that if he did not wish us to go to the Great House, we must not think of going. Charlie was glad to have my mother's conscience set at rest, for he and Mr. Moorsom had agreed on making an excursion that day, to see a waterfall some miles distant from Morfa Bach, and they wished us all to join in it. Hilary had been persuaded to lend a light cart and horse; Charlie was to drive us, and we were to spend the whole day out-of-doors.

It proved a perfect day—one of those bright, still September days, when one feels obliged to make the most of every open-air pleasure, because the very perfection of its beauty warns one that the fading-time is near. We all enjoyed the excursion, my father and mother most of all. Mr. Moorsom was particularly watchful over our father all day, and managed so cleverly that he was able to do everything that we did. He helped him to climb to the top of the hill, and carefully explained each of the views to be seen thence, and afterwards led him safely so near the waterfall that he could feel the spray on his face, and catch, amid the roar of its waters, the crisp patter of the droppings from the overhanging trees which caught some of the water in its first plunge, and let it fall back into the dark pool below in a soft rain. My father's look of delight when his ear caught this sound, was as good a sight to see as any we had that day. Nesta could not but observe Mr. Moorsom's kindness to our father, and like him the better for it. I don't think he misunderstood the gratitude she showed in her own sweet, grave way, but it drew them nearer together than they had been all the week, and removed a slight coldness in their manner to each other, which had sometimes seemed to divide our party. For that one day we were all as happy and unconcerned as if we had agreed to forget everything that had passed, or that was to come.

We did not leave the waterfall till late in the afternoon, and it was growing dusk when we reached the little wood at the top of Morfa Bach Hill. Here we had to alight, for Charlie had promised Hilary not to drive the cart along the

wood path. There was a good deal of talking and laughing as Mr. Moorsom helped my father and mother and Nesta to get down from our awkward conveyance. I remember how cheerfully our voices sounded in the still evening air. I walked on, to open the gate, while they stood together, still talking.

At first I thought it was Hilary whom I saw leaning against the closed gate, and looking fixedly at the party grouped on the top of the hill. I was going to make some playful exclamation of surprise at his spending even the dark hours of a September day so idly, but as I came near, I perceived that the figure was slighter than Hilary's, the attitude one into which he never by any chance fell. I thought I recognised both, but I kept silent till I was near enough to see the stranger's face. Suddenly, just as I came near, he started up, drew his cap down over his face, and pushing hastily past me, plunged into a by-path, which led to one of the entrances of the Morfa Mawr gardens. I had not succeeded in seeing his face, but I had no longer any doubt who it was. It was Shafto Carr.

That was the reason of Hilary's ill humour at breakfast, then ! The party whose coming we had so long dreaded had actually arrived, and we must make up our minds to the chance of seeing one or other of them whenever we left the house. My heart sank for Nesta. How little she or I thought, when we took leave of Mr. Carr in London, that the next time we met him he would brush past me without a word !

I felt convinced that he had recognised me, and seen the rest of the party. He was in the shade ; their figures were relieved against the still light sky. What had his thoughts been as he stood to watch them ? What had brought him to linger near our gate ? On the whole I was not sorry that Rosamond Lester's betrothed should hear Nesta's voice sounding for once as gaily as it used to sound. My heart felt very bitter against him, and I wished him to believe that she had learned to value him as lightly as his conduct showed he had valued her. I knew there was no fear that Nesta would not guard her dignity, but I was glad she could now be warned, that she need not come upon him as suddenly as I had done.

All the evening I was planning in what words I could best convey to Nesta the discovery I had made, but before I had

an opportunity of being alone with her, Hilary forestalled me.

"Mother," he began, standing upright against the table, and speaking in a dry, hard tone; "you sometimes complain that I never bring you home any news; I have some to-night. Lady Helen Carr and her son, and Miss Lester arrived at Morfa Mawr yesterday afternoon. They are to stay here all the autumn. You see you need not trouble yourself any longer about entertaining Mrs. Western."

This was a long speech for Hilary to make, but it fell flat. No one answered. I did not look at Nesta, and I hoped no one else would. I suppose she must have given a sudden start, for a reel on which she was winding a skein of silk fell from her hands, and rolled to the opposite end of the room. Richard Moorsom went on his knees to look for it, and was a long time hunting it out of the dark corner where it had hidden itself. His face wore a painfully embarrassed expression when he brought the reel back to Nesta; I think he was afraid of seeming to look at her curiously. He need not have been; there was nothing to see. By that time she had regained as much of her composure as she had ever lost; her quiet "thank you" seemed to take the spell off us all. When I next ventured to look at her, she had finished winding her skein and was standing behind Hilary's chair, talking to him, with her hand on his shoulder. She was not saying anything particular, only asking some question about a poor Irish boy who had been taken ill in the harvest-field; but Hilary's brow cleared as he turned round to answer her, and after a few minutes' talk, the hard set lines of his mouth softened into a smile almost as sweet and patient as that with which she was looking down at him. I had noticed once or twice before that Nesta had more power to help Hilary out of his moody fits than any one else had.

I went to bed, hoping that the next morning might prove rainy enough to prevent the visitors at Morfa Mawr from venturing to church. We had had more than our share of sunshine; for once I should have been glad to see the hills opposite my window wrapt in rain-clouds. I did not have my wish; the weather next morning was as perfect as it had been all the week, and Nesta looked so much as usual when she came down to breakfast, that I felt almost ashamed of advising her to stay at home on the

plea that yesterday's fatigue had indisposed her for the walk to church.

"Thank you, Janet," she said, decidedly ; "but you need not be afraid ; I am quite equal to it, indeed I am. I have been thinking, and I am sure it is best for me to go to church to-day. It will be a good beginning of the week, and I shall be better and stronger for not missing it."

I had followed her to her room to make my request, and now I stooped to kiss her pale face. "Darling, you don't know how sorry I am for you. I cannot bear to think of you having to see them. I think he might have kept away from here."

"It is their home—hers, and soon to be his. Let us try to welcome them to it ; I shall do it best in church to-day."

"I cannot forgive him," I said, bitterly. "He has chosen the Great House and the Morfa estate instead of you."

"Nay, let us hope it is not quite that," said Nesta. "I can bear it best when I think of all the excuses there are for him. I was not equal to him, and I never could forget that his mother thought I was spoiling his life. Perhaps I ought to have believed that my love was worth more than Rosamond Lester's riches. But I could not be sure of that when I had been hearing his mother talk ; so I grew depressed and doubtful, and he misunderstood me and was disappointed in me. It is a great rest to feel that I need not blame him very much."

"Well, we had best not talk about it," I said. "If I am to feel charitably towards him at church to-day, I must not hear you excuse him."

We had a long hot walk. When we reached the church the service was just beginning, and most of the congregation assembled in their pews. The great square pew in the chancel, appropriated to the Morfa Mawr family, was in full view of ours. The first glance showed me that it was occupied. I tried not to see the faces in it, but even with my eyes on my prayer-book, I could not prevent the well-known forms and attitudes from haunting me. There were Lady Helen's stooping shoulders, more drawn together than ever, and there were her keen grey eyes bent upon us. She looked more than a year older than when I had last seen her ; even success could not brighten her face. Rosamond Lester stood by Mrs. Western. Her back was turned to our pew, design

edly, I thought, for when the sermon began and she ought to have faced the pulpit as Mrs. Western did, she kept her place. I only knew her by her figure, so much taller than any other, and by the stately carriage of her head. In the corner of the pew which best commanded ours, sat Mr. Carr. I hoped Nesta had not so good a view of his face as I had, for it wore an expression of such thorough dissatisfaction and melancholy, that even my anger against him was softened a little. Glancing from his half-scornful, half-dejected face to Nesta's, I could not help moralizing on the greater pain and injury which comes to a person from wrong-doing, than from suffering wrong.

I hope other people listened more attentively to the sermon than I did. At length it was over and the congregation began to leave the church. The occupants of the great pew moved first. My father generally liked to linger to the last, and then walk slowly down the church-yard, leaning on Hilary's arm. I hoped we might thus escape meeting the Morfa Mawr party. Some of them must have lingered purposely, for though my father walked more leisurely even than usual, they were still standing near the gate when he emerged from the porch.

There was nothing for it but to walk on and speak to them. Hilary and my father and mother went first. Nesta was detained by a poor woman, who wished to speak to her, and seeing that Mr. Moorsom was determined to wait for her, I stayed too, and so did not witness the first greetings. When we left the church Lady Helen was already in eager talk with my father and mother, and Mrs. Western, holding both Hilary's hands, was claiming his sympathy in her joy at having her dear child with her again. Shafto and Rosamond were standing together, but neither looking nor speaking to each other. I think Rosamond's eyes were turned pityingly on my father's face. No one could now see him without noticing that he was blind. Lady Helen must have been a little startled, perhaps shocked, by the discovery. I thought so, at least, from the flush on her cheek, and the quick eager way in which she was speaking on indifferent subjects to my mother.

Mr. Carr's eyes were fixed on the ground when we came up, but I felt that he had been watching us three as we stood under the porch, and as we walked down the path between

the graves. A moment of embarrassed silence followed ; we stood still, none of us daring to look up, or speak a word of greeting. At last Nesta came forward and held out her hand, first to Rosamond, and then to Shafto Carr. She looked full in his face as she turned to him, holding out her hand. Did he read all there was in her look as clearly as I did ? The forgiveness, the renunciation, the dignified acceptance of a new position towards him—the sorrow, the hope for him, that gave the upward glance of her gentle eyes such pathetic meaning to me. Whatever he saw in her face, he was clearly unprepared for such a greeting from her. He half-uttered an exclamation, checked himself, and then put out a trembling uncertain hand and clasped hers. I could not interpret his manner as I interpreted Nesta's. Was it anger, or bitter grief, or shame that so darkened and changed his face ? He stood for an instant holding Nesta's hand, looking at her with angry, inquiring eyes ; and then, seeing Mr. Moorsom approaching to speak to her, he suddenly turned his back upon us, and walked through the gate of the church-yard out into the road.

"Ah, Shafto is growing impatient," I heard Lady Helen's sharp voice exclaim. "He thinks the churchyard not the fittest place for greetings. Let us move on."

We followed her towards the carriage which was waiting outside, but there was another little pause before they got in. Rosamond would turn to speak me, and Mrs. Western would reiterate her entreaties that we would all come soon and often to the Great House, not perceiving that no one was in a mood to listen to them. At last, Lady Helen, losing all patience, called her son to hand Rosamond into the carriage. She had to speak twice before he heeded her ; meanwhile, Rosamond sprang in and seated herself. I did not envy Lady Helen the look she got from under her son's black brows as he came near to offer her his arm. If the success of her anxious scheming for him had brought such bitter feelings between them as that look betrayed, I fancied even she must begin to think she had paid dearly for it.

I saw Mr. Carr turn one more look on Nesta before the carriage drove away ; it was just as he seated himself by Rosamond's side. She had addressed some remark to him, and her beautiful proud face had been turned to him for a moment. After answering her in a single word, he glanced

aside at Ernestine, who was still standing where we left her in the churchyard, her eyes fixed on the ground, her head bent, her hands clasped before her, as still as if a spell had fallen over her and she had no power to move or look up. Lady Helen, following the direction of her son's eye, glanced too from Rosamond to Nesta, and then a triumphant proud smile brightened her face. I hardly wondered at it as I contrasted the two, our pale, grave Ernestine, who looked more than usually insignificant and faded that day, and Rosamond, whose proud beauty fixed the wondering eyes of the villagers on her with a sort of reverent awe. No doubt about which it would gratify Lady Helen's pride most to call her daughter. Her pride—but only her pride. The triumph of Lady Helen's look was not softened by any touch of love towards the daughter she had chosen. In the bottom of my heart I pitied Rosamond more than Nesta. How cold, how hard the glitter of prosperity that surrounded her looked to me who knew what there was beneath it!

I thought I should have had an opportunity of disburdening my mind of some of my concern for Rosamond, for Hilary invited me to walk home with him by the shore; but when we were alone I had not courage to talk to him, he looked so thoroughly disturbed and unhappy.

We were within sight of the house before he spoke. "Well," he said at last, with a deep sigh, "there's one comfort in it. One good comes to me from her marrying that fellow; I shall get away from here after poor Mr. Lester is gone. If she had married any one else I might have felt it a duty to stay on for my mother's sake; but nothing, nothing on earth, shall induce me to serve him. After his conduct to Nesta there never *need* be anything but enmity between us."

"Oh, Hilary, I am afraid you are glad to have such a reason for hating him. However, I agree that you cannot possibly stay when he is master. Yet I shall be sorry to go. Our father and mother are so happy here; it will seem cruel to disturb them."

"Many things in this world seem cruel, but one has to do them and bear them."

I looked up into Hilary's face. His lips were white and pressed close together; his brow knit into its darkest frown.

"Yes, but may not part of the hardness come from our

not understanding the beginning, nor seeing the end, of what is happening to us?" I ventured to suggest.

"I don't know. We *must* hope so, or there would be no getting on at all. As one grows older one learns that there is no use 'kicking against the pricks.' One must take what comes, and crush out the thought that the very opposite would have been better."

"How wonderfully in our father's case resignation has taken all the sting out of his trial!"

"Yes, but I'm not like him."

"He says he was once very like you."

"Well, here we are at home. Don't say anything to the others about the prospect of having to leave here. We'll keep all the trouble we can to ourselves."

In the evening, after tea, Nesta and Mr. Moorsom had a long walk up and down the garden in the twilight. I wondered at their staying out so late, and was a little curious, I confess, to know what they had been saying to each other. There was neither excitement nor gloom on either face when they came in, only I thought they were a little more intimate and friendly than before. It was Mr. Moorsom's last evening, and he had some conversation with my mother after he came in from the garden. He seemed to be taking a long leave of her, for I could not hear anything said about future meetings. During supper he spoke as if he were likely to be absent from England for some time. He had a mind to travel for a year or two; perhaps he should go to Jamaica, where his mother had some property. At Deepdale, he said, everything was in such order that he could not find enough to occupy him; perhaps out there, he might find real hard work, and people who wanted some one to look after them. Ernestine applauded the project, and drew him on to talk of schemes for converting idle negroes into industrious, orderly farm labourers; and Hilary struck in with suggestions and questions about the nature and capabilities of West Indian soil, which gave the conversation a decidedly practical and unsentimental tone.

My mother, meanwhile, sighed, and confessed that she did not like to hear of people going so far away. There must, she supposed, be clergymen or missionaries, or some one to look after those idle negroes, who, after all, were quite content, and would not thank Mr. Moorsom for coming out to

make them work, whereas his mother and all his friends in England would miss him sadly.

Mr. Moorsom managed to interrupt a question of Hilary's to remark, in rather a shaky voice, that the hope of being sometimes spoken of and recollected here, where he had passed the most precious week of his life, would be the best he should take away with him. My mother hesitated for a suitable reply, and Nesta took advantage of the pause to observe that it was late, and that since Mr. Moorsom and Hilary were to start early next morning, we ought not to keep them up longer. So our last good-byes were rather hastily spoken.

I followed Nesta to her room, half hoping to hear some word of regret for our friend's departure. I had learned to like him so much, that I was almost provoked at her complete indifference.

"Poor fellow ! how sorry he is to leave us," I said.

"Yes, he and Hilary are cut out for friends."

"You and he had a long talk in the garden," I said.

Nesta could not help smiling. "Oh, Janet, I did not know you were so inquisitive." Then, growing grave, she added, "Dearest, I have not disappointed you, have I? You did not think that anything he could say would change me?"

"Hardly ; and yet it was unlike you to let him talk so long, if you were quite resolved."

"He asked me to listen, and I am glad I did, for I have made him understand me better than he did before, and, I hope, removed some painful thoughts. He knows now that it is just because I am so grateful, and esteem him so highly, that I cannot do what he asks. He wished to speak to me this evening, because he thought I must be so mortified by what passed to-day, that it would do me good to hear of his constant love and homage. I acknowledged how nobly kind the thought was, and I hope I have made him see that I could not be so selfish as to take all his love merely to make it serve as a shield for my own vanity."

"But you might have learned to love him for himself. You acknowledge how good he is."

"Too good not to deserve a more entire love than I can ever give him. Don't look pained, dear Janet ; I am not speaking as if my life were spoiled, or I were always to be unhappy. I don't mean to be, you shall see, if you will let me take my own way. I have a feeling that I cannot go back

in my life. It seems like going back to let a fresh earthly love fill exactly the place of one that has been taken away. If the vacant place is ever to be rightly filled, and the heart and life made free and perfect again, it ought to be by the coming in of a higher and more beautiful love than the old, or all the pain and agony would have been in vain. I can understand that sometimes when a person has only loved a little, or made a mistake, the second love may be truer and more beautiful than the first ; but I gave my heart away so entirely, and have taken it back with so much pain, that it seems impossible for me to give it again. Yet I hope I shall not grow cold-hearted. I think not. I think I love every one better for what I have suffered ; but I want to love God best of all. Once I felt as if I had no room for him in my heart ; every corner of it was filled with the idol I had set up for myself. Now I have learned the truth of what Thomas à Kempis tells us, that 'He is the true peace of the heart, and that all things out of Him are hard and restless.'"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Take her for your wife,
For I have wished this marriage night and day
For many years."

TENNYSON.

WE were very quiet for some days after Richard Moorsom left us. Hilary found work for himself on a distant part of the estate, and was absent all day ; and Nesta avoided the chance of encountering visitors by being constantly busy in her own part of the house. On Wednesday Lady Helen and Rosamond called, but I was out, so they only saw my father and mother. The visit lasted half-an-hour. Lady Helen talked to my father, and Rosamond to my mother ; but, though my curiosity led me to cross-question both very particularly, I could not gather a satisfactory account of the interview. My mother confessed that she could not bring herself to meet Rosamond Lester as cordially as she would have done a year ago. She had not been rude, she assured

me, but she could not seem pleased to see Rosamond, or encourage her to speak about her prospects. They had just said a little about the beautiful harvest weather, that was all. My father, on the contrary, had fairly out-talked Lady Helen. She was disposed to be communicative, and had not only mentioned her son's approaching marriage with Rosamond, but had presumed to compliment my father on the good judgment he had shown in putting an end to Nesta's and Shafto's engagement. I could not make my father repeat his answer, but I gathered that he had spoken his mind very plainly respecting Mr. Carr's conduct, and that Lady Helen had taken leave, in a less triumphant and self-congratulatory state of mind, than she was in when she came. As she wished my mother good-bye, she informed her that Mr. Carr had left Morfa that morning, and was not expected to return for some weeks.

After hearing this account of the morning's visit, I was surprised to receive in the evening a little note from Rosamond, begging me earnestly to spend the next morning at Morfa Mawr. I had rather not have gone; I felt we could never again have any comfortable intercourse with Rosamond Lester, and that it would be better to drop at once all semblance of cousinly intimacy; but I saw that Nesta and Hilary would be disappointed if I refused, so I let myself be over-persuaded. On Thursday my father and I walked up early to the Great House together. When we arrived there Mrs. Western took my father up to Mr. Lester's room, and directed me to seek Rosamond in the library. Morfa Mawr was no longer so formidable a place as it had been in the days of Mr. Lester's vigilance. I was struck with the more homelike aspect of the house when I entered the library, and saw Rosamond sitting writing at a table, with her favourite Newfoundland dog reposing at her feet. There was a look of greater gentleness on her face than I had ever seen there before. Yet she did not seem happy. To my surprise, her large eyes filled with tears as I took her hand. She turned from me immediately, and did not speak till she had perfect command of voice; but I could not after that keep up the cold, formal manner I had prescribed for myself. We talked first of my father, and I was drawn on by her questions to relate much of our family history since I had last seen her. She listened intently till I began to enlarge on the generous manner in

which Hilary had behaved since my father's misfortune had made us all dependent on him ; then she interrupted me.

"It is right you should be grateful," she said, "but I do not see how my cousin Hilary *could* have acted otherwise. Would not every son have done the same ?"

"No doubt there are many sons who would have shared their home with a father and mother situated as Hilary's are," I answered ; "but there is not one in a hundred who would have made them feel, as he does, that the home is theirs, not his ; that he is the least important child of the house, instead of the master. It is not the thing done, it is his way of doing it that is so noble."

I saw for an instant a bright light of enthusiasm shine from Miss Lester's eyes ; then some gloomy thought seemed to rise up in her mind and quench it.

"You must forgive me," she said, "if I cannot see any *great* proof of nobleness in sacrifices made for those one loves. I am not depreciating your brother's conduct or yours : I am only envying you. It is your just reward for having always obeyed and loved, that your duty is plain and your sacrifices free-will offerings. It is my punishment for my past rebellion, that now, when I want to obey, there is no sweetness in my surrendering of myself, though I have tried to make it complete. It has to be done doubtfully, with a troubled conscience, as a proof of repentance rather than of love."

I was puzzled how to answer. While I hesitated Rosamond spoke again, altering her tone as if she were beginning upon a fresh subject.

"I have asked you so many questions, that now I ought to tell you something about myself. It is something that will surprise you—but such announcements always do surprise. I am engaged to Mr. Carr. You know him a little, I think. Were you not once staying at Broadlands when he was there ?"

Her countenance did not change as she spoke. No colour flew to her face, no light came into her eye. There was a quiet mournfulness in her voice and manner that sat very strangely on her.

"I should have been surprised," I answered, "if I had not heard it before. Lady Helen Carr told my father.

But even then it was old news; we had heard it months before."

"Indeed! My engagement only dates from last Sunday afternoon."

"From last Sunday afternoon!" I could not help repeating her words with an accent of astonishment—almost of dismay, that naturally awoke her wonder.

"Why does it surprise you so much that it should have been last Sunday? Why more than if it had been months ago?"

"Only," I stammered—"only I should be sorry to think you had engaged yourself hastily on any sudden impulse."

"Why, if it was a right impulse?"

"It is such a very serious thing to do. But I beg your pardon. I have no right to speak in this way."

"Yes, you have. I wish to explain to you how my engagement came about, to show you that I am not acting from caprice, or quite without consideration. I have considered, indeed I have, for months. I could not help it that the moment when I had to decide came upon me suddenly."

"I hope you don't think I take upon myself to judge you."

"Oh, Janet, if you could be more friendly to me! I have so few friends."

Once more Rosamond's beautiful eyes filled with tears, and I was moved to say some affectionate words, which seemed to comfort her.

"I have had few real friends," she went on, "but I have always found one in Mr. Carr. When he first paid us a visit here, he and I became friends at once, just because we came to a mutual understanding that we were never to be anything more. We both knew my grandfather's plan for us, and I felt grateful to him for understanding at once how distasteful it was to me; how it humbled me to know that my grandfather had promised to give me away as part of the estate, to make up to Lady Helen for her old disappointment. Mr Carr used to laugh with me over my indignation on this subject, and during the summer of his first visit, he saved me from many a quarrel with my grandfather, by hiding my ill-humour, and keeping up a sort of mock courtship when either

Lady Helen or Mr. Lester was present. At last something made me see that we had carried our mystification too far, and deceived others as well as those we meant to deceive. Then came my long illness ; our intercourse was interrupted, and when we met again a year and a half after, we did not fall into the old pleasant intimacy. We were both very much changed. He had grown older and graver, and my mind was weighed down by remorse for my conduct to my grandfather. In my sorrow I found him a kind, considerate friend. When I saw that his kindness never varied, I began to value it—I have had so little steady, uniform kindness shown me in my life. The very best people have been changeable and capricious to me. But I don't know why I say all this to you ; it sounds as if I were excusing myself for having accepted Mr. Carr. I know it needs no excuse. I only wish to show you, that the step I took last Sunday was not really hasty and unpremeditated. I might not have taken it so soon if we had not returned to Morfa just now. I came because Mrs. Western encouraged me to hope that my grandfather would be glad to see me, and that my coming would do him good. It disappointed me greatly to find, when I arrived, that he shrank from seeing me, and was disposed to put off our meeting from day to day. Lady Helen was admitted into his room at once, and he showed plainly that he liked to have her near him, but he never asked for me. On Sunday I was told that I might sit with him for a few minutes during the afternoon. Lady Helen and Mr. Carr went to his room first. I was to follow. Lady Helen thought my grandfather would be less agitated by seeing me if they were already with him. Ever since my grandfather's seizure I have always, I confess, shrunk from going into his room. It is terrible to see him whom I have feared and almost hated, lying there such a pitiable object ; so helpless and stricken, only able to greet me with a slow, painful movement of his eyes. I felt this pain more vividly than ever last Sunday afternoon ; when I met his look of dumb, helpless suffering, I hardly knew how to bear it. I wished to throw myself on my knees before him, and confess my remorse for having thwarted him during the years when I might have made him happy. Of course I dared not do this. Lady Helen had warned me not to show the least emotion. I could only walk up to his sofa, and stand looking at him. I have never kissed him since I

was a child. His eyes were fixed on me, and there was no anger in them ; that was the most I could hope for. At last, seeing that I could scarcely stand, Mr. Carr drew a chair near the sofa, placed me in it, and stood for an instant by my side. Then my grandfather's face changed ; his eyes brightened, and his poor distorted lips parted into a smile—the only smile, I think, that in all his life was ever called up by me. Mr. Carr was turning to move away, but I, not thinking much of what I was doing, but only anxious to please my grandfather, put my hand on his arm to keep him near me. He knelt down by my side, and took my hand in his ; then my grandfather's face brightened still more ; and during all the time we stayed, he lay back on his sofa quiet and smiling, looking at us both. Once he turned his head round to Lady Helen, and said something. I could not understand the strange, half-spoken words, but Lady Helen told us they meant, that he was glad to see Shafto and me together, and that he hoped we would often come. I was happy while I was in my grandfather's room. As soon as I had left it, a terrible feeling of dismay at what I had done came over me. I could hardly bring myself to come down stairs when the dinner-bell rang ; but I felt that I must make the effort. I suppose Mr. Carr saw how constrained and frightened I was, for in the evening he spoke to me. I need not tell you what he said. I don't suppose it was such an offer as most girls would have listened to, but it pleased me. There were few professions of love, only promises of faithful friendship and kindness. He did not profess to be indifferent to my fortune, as every one else who has ever spoken to me has done (how untruly, I know !). He told me that he was ambitious, but he said that his ambition was of a kind that I should not be ashamed to share. I believe him. I shall take an interest in his career ; and if even we are not very happy (I don't expect ever to be very happy), we may do a great deal of good. Don't you think so ? Now I have told you all, cannot you say a word of approval or congratulation ? Indeed I want some encouraging words !”

She had set me a hard task, and I did not perform it well. To my great relief, my stammering, vaguely-expressed hopes for her happiness were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Western, with a message from my father that he was waiting for me.

When I rose to go, leaving my sentence unfinished, I saw by the expression of Rosamond's face that the way in which I had received her confidence had pained and disappointed her.

She made no remonstrance, but her manner to me changed. After that day we met often, and were very good friends when we met, but she never again attempted to open her heart to me. I was sorry to lose her friendship, sorry to seem cold and capricious to her, but I could not help it. For Hilary's and Nesta's sake, it was important that we should have little intercourse with Morfa Mawr, and avoid hearing and seeing the talk and preparations that were likely to go on during the coming months. If I had not been convinced of this necessity from the first, I should have felt it when I saw how very much disturbed both Hilary and Nesta were, by the history of my interview with Rosamond. I would gladly have concealed part of what I had heard, but they both showed the same perverse determination to know every word, while almost every word gave them fresh pain. Nesta was always sweet and cordial in her manner to Rosamond when they met, yet our visits to the Great House grew daily more unsatisfactory and painful to us all, and I was glad when the shortening October days gave me an excuse for restricting our walks within a shorter distance than Morfa Mawr.

In October George Armstrong came to spend some weeks of his autumn vacation with us. I suppose that I profited most by this visit, for I remember that I then first discovered that the Morfa Bach farm-house *could* look as home-like as the old London home; but I think the others had a large share of advantage too. George could not come anywhere without bringing sunshine with him. My father and Hilary claimed the help of his clear judgment to decide some questions of family economy that were perplexing them just then.

Charlie was now quite well enough to return to college, and sufficiently prepared, my father thought, to try again for a degree, or even for honours; but unhappily there were large bills still owing to tradesmen in Cambridge, and my father did not like him to return there till he was able to pay them. Poor Charlie! how sorrowful he used to look when the question of how this difficulty could be met, was brought up again and again in our evening consultations. The money he owed amounted to a far larger sum than we could hope to economize in a reasonable time, but it had occurred to Hilary

that we might raise it by selling the Tan-y-Coed farm,—he, for his part, being ready to relinquish the future possession of his estate (as we had always called it) for the sake of furthering Charlie's return to college, and relieving my father's mind from anxiety on his account. The other members of the family demurred at so extreme a measure. Our very existence as a family, in my mother's eyes, was bound up in our retaining possession of that dearly-prized corner of mountain land.

George had a patient ear for everything that was said on both sides of the question. It was like him, to be ready to hear all we wished to say, but I thought now and then that he was more than necessarily forward in bringing up the discussion, and I wondered why he would persist in asking my mother questions about her father and uncle, which were certain to tempt her to descant lengthily on the altered circumstances of the Wynne family, and to lament over the failure of her father's often-made assertion, that as long as there were Wynnes in the world, the Tan-y-Coed and Morfa lands must of necessity belong to them. My mother thought it almost irreverent to take the last step, which proved her father's words untrue.

My surprise at George's curiosity lessened when I learnt that he had spent two mornings at Tan-y-Bryn, in Mr. Morgan's office—engaged in hunting out papers and deeds referring to the Tan-y-Coed property, which in old times had been intrusted to Mr. Morgan's father, and which no one had since thought of taking out of the son's hands.

Hilary was annoyed with George for having any communication with Mr. Morgan, and would not forgive him for calling at his office, though George reminded him that it was impossible to sell the Tan-y-Coed farm till we had all the necessary papers in our possession.

The last trace of pleasant weather seemed to go with George Armstrong. I discovered, the morning he left us, that winter had really set in, with murky skies and clinging mist, and weary down-pouring of rain, that washed the last yellow leaves from the trees, and made the lanes impassable to all but very determined feet. Even wood fires could hardly lighten up the dark sitting-room, or keep the mist out of the octagon parlour. It certainly was a dreary November. We only saw Miss Lester twice during the month. Mr. Carr

spent a fortnight at Morfa Mawr, but it rained incessantly while he stayed, and Nesta and I were glad of an excuse to keep close to the house and avoid all danger of meeting him. When he left, we learned from Mrs. Western that a late day in December had been fixed for the wedding.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“New Year coming on apace,
What have you to give us?
Bring you scathe, or bring you grace!”

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

It wanted two days to Christmas. My mother, Mrs. Morgan, and Nesta were busy in the kitchen-regions with preparations for coming festivities, in which I was not considered competent to take part. My father and Charlie, disgusted with the unusual bustle that pervaded the house, set out for a long walk; and I, feeling indisposed to settle to my usual employments, was driven to occupy myself in tidying the bookshelves and putting my writing-desk in order. It was just the sort of work to suit an idle person on a busy morning. I soon succeeded in making the study look as unlike itself as the rest of the house; but, having accomplished this, I did not make much further progress in the task I had set myself. Looking over old letters is a very proper occupation for the end of the year; but it is apt to be a thoughtful one. I fell into musing fits, during which my tidying stood still. What a long year it had been! How terrible some of its events would have seemed, how impossible others, if they had been predicted to me on its first day! and yet they had come, and we had lived through them, overwhelmed neither by the joy nor the sorrow.

From the past my thoughts flew on to the future, and, in spite of the experience on which I had been musing, I fell into my old habit of picturing it to myself. I seemed to see a monotonous, somewhat shaded road stretching on before us. One tranquil year would, I thought, follow another, while my father and mother would pass gently towards old age, and

Hilary would grow more and more engrossed in his work, and Nesta follow her chosen career of quiet usefulness, and George and I look forward patiently—perhaps with a little heart-sickness—to the happiness which we believed could only be reached through long years of waiting.

I was roused at last from my reverie by hearing footsteps in the hall. I concluded that my father and Charlie had returned from their walk. I must not let them find the study more untidy than they had left it. I stooped down and began to collect the scattered books and papers, intending to thrust them into my desk and leave their arrangement till I was next in the mood for such work. I had my back to the door, and did not turn round when it opened; but the sound of the first footfall I heard made me throw down my bundle of papers and spring up. My ear had not deceived me: it was George Armstrong who had entered the room. After the first joyful exclamation, I was not surprised at his appearance. I had been planning all the morning how pleasant it would be if he were to bethink himself of coming down to spend his Christmas holiday with us.

It was not till our first greetings had been spoken that I observed something unusual in George's face and manner. I could not exactly say what it was, he did not look at all like a bearer of bad news; yet he certainly did not talk or listen like a person at ease. He was restless and pre-occupied. I scolded him at last for giving a random answer to some question I had asked. "What could he be thinking of?" His eyes grew eager and yet grave as he turned them suddenly on me.

"Shall I tell you? Janet, are you prepared to hear strange and startling news, which I have come on purpose to bring?"

Studying his face, and seeing nothing alarming there, I playfully defied him to tell me news that I should consider strange. I was in a mood to take wonders calmly, and he would find I had anticipated whatever he had to tell. Had he been made a judge, or my father a bishop?

"Janet, the news I have to tell has often been in your mind—I believe it is there now. Say it out boldly at once, and save me the trouble of telling you."

He was mistaken. Nothing had been further from my thoughts till that moment. Then all at once I knew; and

just because I had so often fancied receiving such news, did the reality startle and almost shock me. I think nothing frightens one so much as finding a dream come true.

"You have found out something about the Morfa estate," I said—"the something that Mr. Morgan has always known. Oh, George! tell me—be quick."

He laughed at me for looking so frightened, and the laugh did me good. When the colour had returned to my cheeks, and I looked like myself again, he answered my question.

"I have found out far more than ever Morgan knew. Janet, I have found proof—certain proof—that the Morfa estate has never belonged legally to Mr. Lester, and that your mother is now its rightful owner."

"But Hilary said that was impossible."

"So I should have said three days ago, and yet it is true."

"The Morfa estate—Morfa Mawr, and the mines, and everything—to mamma, do you say? I cannot take it in. What will become of Mr. Lester and Rosamond? Oh, George! after all Lady Helen's scheming! What will Lady Helen say?"

Such a tumult of thoughts rushed upon me—joyful, perplexed, incredulous—that for some time I could neither ask coherent questions nor understand the information which George was eager to give. It was not that day, or for many days, that I fully understood the importance of his discovery. The first thing that grew clear to me was, that I had been right in my surmise respecting Mr. Morgan's curiosity and interest in Llewellyn Wynne. Llewellyn had not died at the time when the report of his death had been believed at Morfa, and the circumstance of his having survived his brother for some ten or fifteen years was one of momentous importance to Mr. Lester. This fact had been proved to him first by Morgan on the day of their last interview, and no doubt it was the shock of receiving such information suddenly which had brought on his illness. Morgan had long had a vague idea that Mr. Lester was anxious to believe that Llewellyn Wynne died when quite a young man; but he had never been able to discover any reason for such anxiety, and he was quite unprepared for the effect his news had upon Mr. Lester. What he witnessed on that day fixed in his mind a suspicion that had long been brooding there; and when he and George had conferred together in the

autumn, being himself in despair of ever gaining any light on the mystery, he had imparted to George all the circumstances of his acquaintance with Llewellyn Wynne, and laid before him the proofs he possessed that his death had occurred in America within the last ten years.

It seemed that Morgan had been able to render some services to Llewellyn Wynne, whom he accidentally came across in some backwood settlement, where he was living in great poverty. A feeling of respect for a family with which his father and grandfather had been connected for many years, had induced Morgan to befriend the unhappy man, and to keep up a certain degree of intercourse with him till the time of his death. Encouraged by his kindness, Llewellyn had frequently dwelt on the subject of his misfortunes, and the injustice inflicted on him by Mr. Lester. He had spoken in a somewhat vague way (much as my mother used to speak to us), about his brother's often-repeated assurance, that he had provided against the possibility of the Morfa estate leaving the Wynne family, and made it certain that, as long as there were people bearing the name of Wynne in existence, the lands, which their ancestors had owned for so many centuries, must remain in their possession. Morgan had paid very little attention to these assurances, which seemed to him entirely unfounded, till his return to England and entrance into his father's business, brought him into constant communication with Mr. Lester. Then various circumstances brought back Llewellyn's words to his mind. A conviction grew upon him that Mr. Lester had never felt secure in the possession of the Morfa estate, till the lapse of twenty years had given him a new title; and it occurred to him that the proofs he held of Llewellyn Wynne's existence within the twenty years, might possibly prove of the greatest importance to the surviving members of Hilary Wynne's family. After his quarrel with Mr. Lester he searched diligently among his father's papers, in the hope of discovering some ground on which Mr. Lester's title might be questioned. Up to the time of George's interview with him he had found no clue to such a discovery.

It was reserved for George to find this clue. He came upon it accidentally while he was making inquiries which had been rendered necessary by the sale of the Tan-y-Coed farm. Tan-y-Coed had belonged to my mother's maternal

grandfather, Mr. Price, of Tan-y-Coed. George had occasion to refer to Mr. Price's will, and there he read a sentence which referred to some marriage-settlement respecting the Morfa estate. He did not understand the words of the sentence, but they awakened his curiosity and his keen discernment. The name of one of the witnesses to the will was known to George. It was that of a London solicitor, whose grandson was still living in London. To his office George went, with some hope of finding the deed of which Mr. Morgan had certainly never heard. After a long search a duplicate copy had been found, and it was this discovery which George considered so important. It proved to be a settlement of the estate, made by Hilary Wynne at the time of his marriage. Influenced by his great anxiety that Morfa should never be alienated from the family, he provided that, if he died without having a son, his brother Llewellyn should inherit the estate; that it should pass to his son if he had one; but that if he also died without male descendants, and Hilary Wynne had a daughter,—it should revert to her. The original of this deed Mr. Wynne had apparently destroyed, most likely, George thought, at Mr. Lester's instigation. It had been Mr. Lester's aim to induce Mr. Wynne to mortgage his estate. This deed had stood in the way, and Mr. Wynne had probably less scruple in destroying it, because he believed that his brother had died childless, and because he hoped to pay off his mortgages to Mr. Lester and secure the inheritance to his only child, when the mines on his estate began to yield the wealth he expected from them. The existence of the duplicate copy of the deed, intrusted by Mr. Price to his solicitor, had probably been forgotten by both Mr. Wynne and Mr. Lester, and it would never have been disinterred from the heap of papers among which it lay concealed, but for George's vigilance.

I think the fact that George was the discoverer gave me more pleasure than the discovery itself. When I grew calm enough to think about it, I was not at all sure that we should be any happier for possessing Morfa, now that Rosamond's approaching marriage with Mr. Carr put out of Hilary's reach the object which he had once thought to gain by such a change of circumstances. Wealth would not restore my father's eyesight, or give my mother the youth and health which would prevent her finding its responsibility a burden.

Neither could it heal the disappointment which had darkened Hilary's and Nesta's lives.

I could only comfort myself by moralizing on the bitter lesson which these events would give to Lady Helen. A sort of pity, even for her, came into my mind as I thought how cruel a mockery of all her scheming, her son's marriage with Rosamond would now be. She had struggled so hard for it—done so much wrong to secure it—and when it was accomplished it would be the thing of all others she would least desire. Rosamond poor—Rosamond without Morfa, would indeed be an unwelcome daughter. I could not help pitying them all. These sobering considerations made me look sufficiently composed when it became necessary to inform the rest of the family of George's arrival. I persuaded him not to tell his news until the evening, and then I was able to enjoy seeing my father's countenance brighten at the sound of George's voice, and hearing the joyful welcomes of my mother and Nesta. I fancied that Hilary showed some surprise and curiosity at George's appearance, the others took his coming as a matter of course. My father, George, and Charlie had the conversation to themselves during dinner; I was too much excited to talk on indifferent subjects, and Nesta was more silent than usual. I learned the cause of her gravity during the evening, when my mother observed casually that Mrs. Morgan had been telling them Mr. Carr was expected to arrive that night at Morfa Mawr. The carriage had passed our house on its way to the station to meet him.

At last dinner was over. Hilary wheeled my father's chair into its winter-corner by the fire, Charlie took down the book which he was in the course of reading aloud to my father in the evening. My mother asked Nesta to bring her knitting, the preliminary to her settling herself for her evening nap.

Then I looked at George, and he began. I hardly know how the news was told. He tried to prepare them for it gradually, but they were all very slow in comprehending his intention. My mother went on fidgetting with her knitting for a long time after he began to speak, and was far more intent on taking up a stitch she had dropped than on listening to what he was saying. My father drummed impatiently with two fingers of one hand on the back of the other, and

looked as if he wished George had allowed him to have his favourite hour's reading before he began upon business. If it had not been for some pertinent questions of Hilary's and for Charlie's eagerness, I think they would have heard George's history to the end without perceiving that it concerned them. When the truth did dawn on my father at last, he fought long, almost angrily against believing it; questioning and cross-questioning, and disputing the accuracy of each one of George's statements. When George's clear answers had laid such proof before him as he could no longer withstand, he became silent. I heard him now and then draw a deep breath, saw him now and then move his hand across his forehead as if to remove a weight that oppressed him; then he leaned back in his chair, and his hands folded themselves together in the quiet attitude of patient waiting that had become habitual to him of late years. To him this change from poverty to wealth only presented itself under the form of a change of burdens, and his heart misgave him that he might find the new heavier and more difficult to carry than the old.

My mother naturally showed more excitement and emotion. She did not trouble herself to understand how the strange news could be true. Hilary believed it, and that was enough for her. She did not care for herself, she said—riches and great estates were nothing to her—but for Hilary—yes; she could not but triumph that Hilary should have his own at last. Had she not always upheld that he had rights which no one but herself acknowledged? Had she not always known that no one but Hilary *could* have a right to the lands her father had taught her to love so dearly?

When at last my father roused himself from his reverie, and my mother's volubility had subsided in a gentle flood of tears, George was able to draw my father and Hilary into grave consultation respecting the steps they should take to prepare Mr. Lester for our intended assertion of my mother's claim to the Morfa estate. My father confessed he felt some scruple against asserting a claim which seemed to him merely legal and not just in itself, since Mr. Wynne, by mortgaging estates which he had no right to mortgage, had defrauded Mr. Lester as well as his daughter.

George said he should have shared my father's feelings if he had not, during his search among Morgan's papers, dis-

covered evidence that Mr. Lester had, during many years, enriched himself at Mr. Wynne's expense. For many years he had evidently plotted to possess himself of the Morfa estate, and, to gain that end, he had practised the grossest deception on his weak-minded brother-in-law. George could not regard the present discovery as anything but a just retribution on Mr. Lester for his treachery to his brother, and for his cruelty and hardness towards his orphan niece.

From this point the conversation grew intricate, and touched on matters I could not understand. After vainly trying to follow it for some time, I slipped away from the circle as Nesta had done before, and followed her to her room.

She had spoken little during the evening, and I found her walking up and down the room with an unusual flush on her cheek and sparkle in her eye. She had been thinking, she told me eagerly, how this strange event would alter my future life, and George's. If we were to be rich, he must certainly share our prosperity. There need be no more waiting for us. He had chosen me when I was poor; with a proud heart I might now rejoice in being able to help him. I liked this thought, and, setting aside every other aspect under which we might have viewed the change, I dwelt upon every joyful circumstance suggested by this one.

In the midst of my happy chatter, Nesta suddenly dropped her head into her hands, and burst into a flood of tears. I was kneeling by her side in a minute, reproaching myself with my thoughtless selfishness. How could I have been so full of my own happiness! How could I have wounded her so! She looked up at last, with her own sweet re-assuring smile. I had not wounded her—oh, no! It did not give her the least pain to plan my happy future. It was the one thing she liked to think of—the one thing that gave her peace. Only now and then a thought would come in about the others who were interested in what we heard to-day.

"Yes," I said. "Oh Nesta, if this had happened a year ago!"

She put her hand over my mouth. "Hush, dear! don't say that. It is so near, it is almost wrong to wish that anything could have altered it, but, I cannot help wondering how they will feel. He will love her the better, Janet, I

know he will. They will be drawn closer together by the loss. He will be so sorry for her, he will want to make her feel that he did not value her for her wealth. He will take her *quite* into his heart now. His ambition will be disappointed ; so he will have to set all his care on her. She will be everything to him. I am glad—yes, I think I am *very* glad of it. How wicked it would be not to be glad enough ! When to-morrow week is over, I shall be—surely I shall then be quite glad to think of his loving *her* above everything.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“ Stripped as I am of all the golden fruit
Of self-esteem ; and by the cutting blasts
Of self-reproach familiarly assailed ;
Yet would I not be of such wintry bareness
But that some leaf of your regard should hang
Upon my naked branches.”

WORDSWORTH.

THE next afternoon George determined to have an interview with Mr. Lester, and I was rather obstinately bent on walking with him to Morfa Mawr. My father, Charlie, and Hilary, had monopolized him the whole morning, and we had calmly submitted, having arranged to secure to ourselves a quiet hour in the afternoon. I was confident enough now of my own importance, to feel sure that George would get through his painful interview with Mr. Lester all the better for having first spent a happy hour with me. So I was, as I said before, a little obstinate about walking with him, though Hilary, who affected to be weatherwise, recommended my staying at home, and prophesied that we should have a snow-storm before the evening closed in. I was not afraid of snow, I said, George and I had pleasant associations with snow-storms. Besides, I had promised Nesta to carry a basket of Christmas presents to a cottage at the foot of the Tan-y-Coed mountain, about half a mile beyond the hall. I should have time to go there and come back while George was with Mr. Lester. If the evening should close in before I rejoined him, it would not matter, as I should have his protection on the

way home. Nesta was not in the room when Hilary made his remark about the coming storm. Before I started on my walk, I went to seek her in the store-room, to receive her last messages for the cottagers, and I found her in some trouble of mind. She had prepared some medicine for a sick child who lived in a lonely cottage half way up the mountain. Hilary had promised to take it when he went out in the morning, but he had either forgotten it, or brought it back in his pocket, for there the bottle still was, as Nesta had just discovered, on the shelf of the store-closet. She feared it was almost too late to send it now, and yet she thought it important that her patient should have it before night. Unfortunately, Charlie and my father had set out on their afternoon walk, and Hilary had started on his ride before Nesta discovered the omission. I thought that it would be better that George should have to wait an hour or so for me at the hall, and that we should both be late for dinner, than that the sick child should want her medicine; so with a little difficulty I persuaded Nesta to intrust it to me. I was, I urged, a very quick walker; the distance was not great, and I might shorten it by taking a certain steep path up the mountain, which I thought I was now a sufficiently expert climber to venture upon.

It was a still, cloudy afternoon, not cold or foggy. The fields looked very green and fresh after the late heavy rains. The great trees of the Morfa woods lifted up their dark, wide-branching arms, distinct and moveless to the last slender twig, against the grey sky, now one even sheet of low-hanging clouds, except on the western side, where a streak of lurid red showed that the sun was already sloping towards the sea. The hill-sides spread themselves out with a peculiar distinctness field by field, so that I thought I could have counted the low stone walls that divided them. The distant mountains had buried their heads in the sky, except when now and then a chance ray of sunlight revealed the glimmering of a snow-crown. The afternoon had a sober beauty of its own that charmed and soothed us. George, however, did not permit me to linger on the way. He was a little uneasy at the prospect of my mountain walk, and very anxious that I should run no risk of being benighted. I promised, when I left him at the Morfa Mawr gates, that I would turn back after leaving my basket at the nearest

cottage, if it was late when I arrived there. The road was in a good state for walking, firm and hard, but not slippery. I made some adventurous short cuts, and was proud, on reaching the first cottage, to find that it still wanted twenty minutes to four o'clock. The cottagers were all out except one little girl, left in charge of the house, and a baby. I left my basket with her, and then held a moment's debate with myself as to whether I should venture to continue my mountain walk or not. I felt timid enough to wish heartily that there had been some one at the cottage I could ask to guide me. I knew I was not clever in finding my way, and in thinking over Nesta's directions I was not sure that I understood them clearly. On the other hand, it seemed a pity to turn back when I was so far on the way. The weather was clear, the air free from mist; indeed, I fancied that the clouds had risen and the light increased since we started on our walk. I thought of the sick child's poor mother, who had now been for some hours anxiously expecting the promised medicine, and I resolved to take courage and venture on. If the worst came, and I found it too dark to return from the mountain cottage alone, I could but wait there till the sick child's father returned home, and make him guide me back to Morfa Mawr.

I fancy that having once admitted fear into my mind, I puzzled myself unnecessarily about the way, and grew over-cautious. I deliberated long at every point where a sheep-walk met the path I was following, and once or twice I returned and took a fresh road, when I fancied that the one I had first chosen was leading me in a wrong direction. I don't remember exactly how the feeling of utter bewilderment that afterwards took possession of me came on. I have read of a like sensation overtaking other wanderers. I only dimly recollect a long struggle against a growing conviction, that I was not nearing the end of the walk, that I had no reason for preferring one path to another, and finally, that every step I took up or down only led me further away from every known landmark. I must have been walking two hours before this feeling came upon me. Sometimes I pressed on, saying to myself that the cottage must be near, and that, now the twilight had deepened into darkness, my best guide would be the light from the cottage window. Then my heart failed me.

I went back a little way, and was frightened from continuing my descent by seeing how perilously steep and difficult the downward road looked, and how the gloom deepened when I faced the valley. Large flakes of snow had begun to descend about the time when I first perceived I had missed my way, but I did not heed them much. It was not till the air seemed to turn suddenly into a giddy whirl of fast falling flakes, and till I felt the ground slippery and cold under my feet, that I understood how much my peril was increased by the setting in of the storm Hilary had predicted. I was standing quite still when this thought came ; it roused me to make a sudden despairing effort. A steep jagged path lay before me, leading straight up the mountain. If I could get to the top, I should at least have safe standing-ground, and command a wider extent of view. I might see a light in some cottage window, or succeed in making some one hear me. I don't know how I managed to gain the height. It was a much more perilous feat of climbing than I ever attempted in broad daylight. I suppose the darkness partly concealed the dangers of the path. At all events, I did not think of it. I only felt I must struggle on, sometimes on hands and knees, but still straight on. When I gained the top, I was spent and breathless. My knees trembled under me. I was forced to throw myself down on the snowy ground. For a time—I don't know how long—I sat still, while my heart beat violently and my head swam from sheer exhaustion.

Then another fearful thought came, and I sprang to my feet and looked round. How dark—how terribly dark it had become ! Night, as it seemed to me, had fallen at once—dark, still night. From above, the low-hanging clouds were emptying themselves on to the earth in a continual downfall of thick snow-flakes. Round me, as far as I could see, lay a bare, unknown tract of pathless mountain-side, just whitening with the falling snow. That was all I could see, strain my eyes as I would ; but what was it I heard ? A regular sound. My ear was awake to it before I was sufficiently collected to know what it was ; then it told me how far I had wandered out of the way. It was the breaking of the tide against the rocks at the foot of Tan-y-Coed Head. I had skirted the mountain, and come round to the sea-side, where I knew it was most dangerous to stray. I thought with a shudder of

histories Hilary had told me of sheep, and of shepherds too, who had wandered, as I had wandered, round the mountain late at night, and been found the next morning dashed to pieces, at the foot of the rocks. I sat down again as these recollections rose up before me, spell-bound to the one level spot I had gained. I would not stir from it, I thought. Night might come, and the snow fall on and on, till I was buried in it, or frozen to death. I had rather have it so than risk that terrible giddy fall—down, down—which I had so often fancied, and the plunge into the dark sea at last. After a time a feeling of numbness and indifference crept over me. It did not seem so very bad to sit still and wait. I was less afraid of the darkness and silence than I had been a little time before.

I was dropping into a doze, in which I fancied myself safe at home again, when a sound roused me. I did not know what it was, or whence it came, but it brought me back to consciousness. I sprang to my feet, and shouted. No answer—not even an echo. Again and again I raised my voice. It seemed to be lost, scattered by the whirling snow. Every time I called, I thought I made less impression on the thick, impenetrable air. The effort did me good, however. I was now quite awake, and sensible of the folly of yielding to drowsiness. I began to walk vigorously up and down the narrow space which I felt to be safe standing-ground. After one or two turns I stopped and shouted again. There was a lull in the storm. I felt that my voice went further. I tried again. Was it the wind bringing me back my own powerless shout, or was it an answer? For some minutes I doubted. Then came a shrill sharp whistle and the bark of a dog, and at length through the snow flakes and the gloom I saw a figure coming towards me. It was a man wrapped in a plaid and followed by a dog. He had come close to me, and I had briefly explained my distress and asked his help before I perceived that it was Shafte Carr whose assistance I was claiming. A few hasty words of explanation followed our recognition of each other. He had started from Morfa Mawr early in the afternoon for a solitary ramble among the mountains. Like myself, he had been overtaken by the snow-storm, and had sheltered in a miner's hut not many yards from the spot to which I had climbed. He had been to the door of the hut to see if there was any abatement in

the storm when he heard my shout and came to my help. It was an inexpressible comfort to learn that there was shelter so near.

An old man carrying a horn lantern made his appearance as Mr. Carr finished speaking, and with his aid and Shafto's I managed to scramble down the hill side to the hut. I felt very weary again when the pressing need for exertion was over. I suppose I almost fainted, for I don't remember the first moments of my entrance into the cottage. When I came to myself, I was seated in a wooden arm-chair by the side of a peat fire. The old man was holding up my snowy cloak, which he had removed from my shoulders, and Mr. Carr was wrapping me carefully in his plaid. There was no one else in the hovel. As I afterwards learned, the old miner lived there alone, with no companion but the dog whose barking had roused me from my first dangerous sleep. It was some minutes before I could remember how I came to be in such a strange place, in such strange company. When the circumstances returned to my mind I still felt too weak and weary to think about them continuously. I sat still, idly amusing myself by wondering over the uses of the mining tools hanging on the wall, by looking into the red glow of the peat fire, or by watching the miner's face and Mr. Carr's as they stood speaking in low tones together on the opposite side of the open hearth. When at length I was able to understand what they were saying, I found they were discussing the possibility of one or the other descending the mountain to Morfa, to let my friends know where I was. From time to time Mr. Carr went to the door to see if the storm were abating. Each time he returned I heard his report with increased interest and impatience, for as I recovered my energy, I began to picture to myself the terrible anxiety they must be enduring at home on my account, and to fancy all sorts of dangers which George and Hilary, and even my father, might at that moment be braving in search of me.

After a long interval, Mr. Carr returned from an excursion outside with the welcome news that the snow had almost ceased falling, and that the night, though cloudy, was not very dark. The miner then thought it possible that he might make his way down the mountain to Morfa, and volunteered to set off at once, leaving Mr. Carr in the hut to take care of me. Before leaving us he built up a good peat fire, and made

me eat some oatcake and drink some warm milk which he had prepared for me. When he had gone, I asked Mr. Carr what o'clock it was, and was surprised to hear it was only eleven o'clock. It seemed to me days since I had left George at the gate of Morfa Mawr. To satisfy me, Mr. Carr tried to calculate how long it would be before our messenger could reach the farm, and as we discussed probabilities, we insensibly fell into friendly, intimate conversation together. "Would not they be anxious about him at Morfa Mawr?" I asked.

Perhaps. He thought so—a little. He had left Morfa soon after noon, intending to enjoy a long solitary ramble among the mountains. He had found himself in the way in the house. I knew him well enough not to be surprised to hear that. It was the old half good-humoured, half bitter smile which played over his face as he said this. How could I see it, reminding me as it did of other times and scenes, without being angry? Somehow or other the strange circumstances of our meeting had put my resentment aside. I could not help falling into the familiar tone that had marked our intercourse in former days. When he questioned me about those at home, I could not help answering fully and minutely. He would hear all about my father's loss of sight, and Charlie's illness, and our coming to Morfa. He did not mention Nesta's name, or I think I should have drawn back; but I remembered afterwards that all his questions had a tendency to bring out information about her. At last I seemed to have told him everything, the conversation flagged, and he remained for some time silent, resting his head on his hand, now and then re-arranging something in the wood-fire, now and then turning his face towards me with a considering, approving look, which I hardly know how to describe, for I have never seen it on any face but his. At last he spoke again.

"Janet, it is a selfish thing to say, but this adventure of yours has turned out a great piece of good luck for me. To be hearing of you all again, to be talking familiarly with one of you, is greater happiness than I ever thought to have again. Sitting here in this strange place, seeing you as kind and sisterly as ever, hearing the dear names familiarly spoken—(yes, don't start up! Why should I not say it?—the dear familiar names)—I can forget all that has happened, all that is going to happen, and live over again an hour from the best part of my life."

"Not with my willing help," I said. "Oh, Shafto! how can you play with such a thought? Don't speak it out to me. I can't patiently hear you regret a past from which you cut yourself off. Do have strength to choose one thing or another, and be firm in your choice. At all events, don't expect sympathy from me, if you regret what you have thrown away."

He bowed his head. "This is not a place or a time to quarrel in," he said, with a curious half-smile. "You have effectually dispelled my dream; but we won't quarrel. Can't you afford to be friends with me for half an hour?"

"I don't think I can," I said. "You have no right to expect me not to be angry with you."

"Have I not? Well, I thought that at the bottom of your heart you would be grateful to me. You have got your wish for your sister. You have secured the lot which you always thought would be the best and safest for her. And I have submitted very quietly—put myself out of her way and her recollection as soon as I understood clearly *that* was what you all expected of me, and what she wished. Perhaps you think I gave her up too easily. I might not have done so if I had believed myself to be worth more. I can understand your despising me. I expected that a little; but I think you should not be angry."

"Shafto," I said, "this is really too bad. You know that you only are to blame, and you are trying to make yourself believe that it is we who have wronged you."

"I do not say you were wrong. On the contrary, looking at it dispassionately—and I always try to look dispassionately even at what concerns myself—I think your father judged prudently, as most people count prudence. She was so young, so gentle-hearted, so timid. Her happiness was so infinitely precious. I have doubted my own power to make her happy; wayward and moody as I know myself to be, no wonder you doubted. What she felt for me was, I always knew, rather an imaginative fancy than a real feeling. When this failed, or at least when it proved not strong enough to withstand opposition and the wooing of a more prosperous lover, your father was right to interfere to break the last link and set her free."

"I don't understand you," I said, bewildered. "You speak as if Nesta had failed you; but it is you who tortured her by your unjust suspicions and cruel silence—it is you who

have put an impassable barrier between yourself and her, by engaging yourself to another. You have been false to her, and now you have not courage even to take the blame. You want to give us a new sorrow, by making us believe that we could have saved Nesta all she has suffered."

Anger, bewilderment, and a strange new fear overcame me as I finished speaking; a blinding rush of tears came to my eyes. While I was struggling with them, Mr. Carr walked across the hut to my side of the fireplace and stood over me. His voice, sounding hoarse and hard, overawed me into calmness again.

"Janet, I have not done what you said. It was not I who put the barrier between us. I had hardly left England before Nesta wearied of our engagement. You yourself confessed this to my mother, and gave her permission to write this opinion to me. The constrained, desponding tone of her own letters proved it to be true. Before I had been three months away, my mother noticed her preference for Richard Moorsom's society, and in the autumn of that year she was engaged to him. This at least is true, or why was Richard Moorsom here, staying with you? Why were they at church together that Sunday? I did not quite believe my mother's words till I saw them together."

"You ought never to have believed it," I said. "You ought to have trusted her; you ought to have known her better. I can't pity you even now, though I see you have been deceived. Nesta is not engaged to Mr. Moorsom; she has never loved any one but you."

I think I meant my words to stab him, but I would have recalled them the minute after they were spoken when I saw how sorry he was. He made no answer, but walked back to the other side of the fireplace and buried his face in his hands.

There was a long silence. I broke it first, for I really could bear it no longer.

"Shafto," I said, "it is too late for explanations. You have been deceived, and I am sorry for you. But it will not do to talk about it now. You must fulfil your promise to Rosamond Lester, and, to do it rightly, the past must be buried and forgotten."

He raised his head. The look of despair had left his face, and he spoke eagerly.

"The past shall not be forgotten. It is not too late even now. Can you not be my friend, Janet? Can you not persuade her to forgive me; I can prove to her how grossly I was deceived. Perhaps I ought not to have believed anything that even my mother said against her, but many things combined to confirm her words—Nesta's long silences, your father's angry letters, which proved, I thought, that he was seeking a pretext for breaking with me. I had some excuse for my credulity—I shall be able to show *her* that I had. Janet, say again what you said just now about Nesta's having never cared for any one but me. If you can say it deliberately and truly, say it again;—it will change my life. I do not presume to say that it will alter hers—she may choose never to forgive me—but it shall so far alter mine, that I will make it my aim to merit her forgiveness. I cannot ask any of you to trust me again now, but I may prove myself worthy of trust hereafter. Give me a motive to try."

I shook my head. In my weakness and weariness I could only make audible one word of my reply.

"Rosamond Lester."

Mr. Carr interrupted me hastily. "I would tell her the whole truth. I should be covered with shame for my conduct to her. I shall all my life hate to think of it; but after what I have learned to-night, I can only do one thing—I can only tell her the whole truth, and trust to her generosity to forgive."

"A month ago you might have done so, but now you cannot, *Shafto*. I cannot explain why. You will know to-morrow. To-morrow will make you feel that you cannot break your engagement with Rosamond Lester. Nesta could only despise you if you did."

"I must hear that from her own mouth, then! I must see her to-morrow."

"No, no! You were weak in letting any one persuade you to give her up. You would be wicked if, having already caused her so much suffering, you disturbed her peace again. You must not throw the weight of such a decision on her: you must make it alone. You ought to have some pity on her."

"You have none on me; but, Janet, I don't blame you. You cannot say anything of me that I shall not agree with. If I have indeed lost her by my own weakness and perversity,

what word of bitterest blame can be strong enough? But if it is too late—if Nesta cannot forgive me, then you may be satisfied. I shall have a punishment great enough for even your estimate of my faults—a life-long punishment—a life-long regret and pain. Don't believe that outward prosperity or gratified ambition will relieve it; for they will not."

"I am sorry for you," I said. I wished I could have said more. I wished I could have told him how Nesta had conquered regret and pain, but my voice failed me.

Mr. Carr turned from me and began to pace the narrow hut. After a time he came to me again.

"I hear steps and voices approaching," he said. "Before this opportunity ends, make me one promise. Tell her all. Don't let her think me worse than I am. Let her know at least that I have always loved, always regretted her."

"Will it be well for her to know this?" I asked. "Cannot you be unselfish enough to think of her peace first?"

"It will be well. I am judging her by myself, her sorrow by what mine has been. I know that it is moral death to have to think meanly of what one loves. You have restored her to me to-night; restore me to her as far as you can. Don't let her think me altogether base. That will be best for her and me. Promise."

"I will tell her all you have said," I answered; "but remember, how she will think of you depends more on what you do for the future than on what I tell her."

I had no time to say more. I heard the sound of approaching steps and voices, and the next moment the door opened, and the little hut seemed full of friendly faces. George and Hilary were both there. Our host had met them at the foot of the mountain, just as they were preparing to ascend. Several of the farm-labourers and cottagers from Morfa Bach accompanied Hilary, and I heard that other bands of searchers were out on the mountain looking for me. I should have been ashamed of causing so much trouble by my own stupidity, if every other feeling had not been swallowed up in gratitude at seeing the joy my safety seemed to give them all. After some consultation it was settled that I must not attempt to walk

down the mountain. A sort of palanquin was improvised with the miner's arm-chair and sundry shawls and blankets which Nesta had made the seeking-party take with them. In this I was placed, well wrapped up from the cold. It was more nervous work, sitting in it and submitting to be carried, than wading through the snow on my own feet would have been—at least I thought so; but I was too grateful not to let them do as they liked with me.

My palanquin had many relays of willing bearers; but our descent of the mountain occupied some hours. We did not reach Morfa Bach farm till the first streak of wintry dawn was breaking in the sky.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“Was never payne but it had joye at last
In the fayre morrow.”

Pastyme of Pleasure.

My mother and Nesta were so convinced that I must be half dead with fatigue and cold, that they would hardly let me give an account of my adventures before they hurried me to bed. On my account the house was kept hushed and quiet the whole day. Every now and then my mother or Nesta stole on tip-toe to look at me, and retreated again when I showed a disposition to wake up and begin talking to them. I was weary enough to be glad of the perfect rest, and yet I only slept for short intervals, starting up always from nightmare dreams of falling down precipices, with a painful conviction that something was happening in the house, and that I ought not to be where I was. The first glance round my own peaceful room re-assured me, but always when I had lain still for a few minutes watching the pale flames of the fire struggling against the rays of wintry sunlight that streamed through the curtains of my window, the feeling of expectation returned, and I sat up and listened anxiously, to try if I could not, through the quiet, catch some sound that would justify my uneasiness. Now and then my ear caught some token of ordinary household occupation that made me smile at my fears—Mrs. Morgan's creaking footsteps on the back

stairs, my father's voice speaking low to Charlie as they returned together from their morning walk. Oftenest, the perfect stillness was only broken by a faint sound which must have been in my ears, for I could not really have heard it. I fancied I heard a bell tolling a very long way off in the air. I could not always hear it, but, when I did, it seemed to come at regular intervals, solemnly and slowly. I knew that we were too far off from any church to hear a bell, even if one were tolling, so I tried to put the notion out of my mind, and to sleep again.

Towards afternoon I did fall into a long, refreshing slumber, and when I awoke I found the sunbeams all gone out of my room, the fire burning bright, and Nesta standing by my bed-side with the news that I had slept for three hours, that George had been asking impatiently for me many times, and that I might now, if I liked, be permitted to rise.

I did not avail myself of the permission immediately. I made Nesta get on the bed, draw the curtains round, and rest her head on my pillow; and then I told her of my meeting with Shafto, and of all he had said to me. She did not interrupt me with any exclamations of wonder or interest, and as I could not see her face, I did not know how she was affected by my words. I only heard a little gasping sigh of impatience if I paused for an instant. When I had finished she asked me a question or two—how he had looked, if I were sure he had got down the mountain safely, if we had parted good friends. Then she begged me to repeat a sentence she had not understood clearly. She was very particular about the words, very much surprised if I hesitated or seemed doubtful about one, very much afraid of losing one; but when she was convinced that I had taxed my memory to the utmost, and paid over to her every syllable I held in trust, as scrupulously as if it had been a piece of gold, she seemed indisposed to carry the conversation further. I had begun already to conjecture about the future, to hope that my chance-meeting with Shafto might change his and Nesta's fate; but she would not let me speak of these hopes. It was not, she said, a day to be making plans for the future. She did not want to go a step beyond what I had told her. She was not sure it would be right to think even of that to-day. The gravity of her tone surprised me. Could it really be that the very thought of the danger I had incurred had cast such

a deep shadow over her that she could not throw it off, even when she had me safe at home?

When I came down stairs I noticed the same subdued gravity about every one. The octagon parlour looked the picture of comfort and peace; I was disposed to be very happy when I found myself resting on the sofa, with George sitting by me, and the recollection of the previous night's peril to heighten my sense of safety. The different members of the household, down to Morgan Owen, came in one by one to look at me and hear from my own lips that I was safe and well. It was pleasant to be made so much of, and yet every one looked so grave that I dare not give myself leave to be as merry as I wanted to be. When at last George and I were alone together, I told him about my fancy, that I had heard a bell tolling all the morning, and I confessed to him that it had made me uncomfortable, and that I wished I could get the sound out of my ears.

He did not laugh at me as I had expected. "I have heard of such things before," he said, reflectively. "Sounds are carried very far on still days like this, when the ground is covered with snow and the wind is favourable."

"Then the church bells have been tolling all to-day?" I asked.

"I dare say the bells of Morfa church have tolled; Mr. Lester died at four o'clock this morning. No, lie down again. Don't look so shocked, dear; it was not after seeing me. The seizure came just twelve hours before he died. When I called yesterday evening he was too ill to see me. He has died without knowing what would have embittered his last day. Morfa has passed from him without intervention of ours."

"I am glad."

"So am I; and yet we said last night that the loss of Morfa would be a just punishment for the poor man's dishonesty and greed. Ought we to be glad that he has not lived to bear it here?"

"I don't know. But for Rosamond's sake let us be glad; it would have been terrible for her if her grandfather's death had been hastened by hearing this news. She will bear it very calmly for herself; I believe she will even rejoice. If she wishes to be free herself from her engagement with Mr. Carr, the change in her circumstances gives her a reason for

doing so, and Lady Helen will give her every help. What haste she will be in to show her that she does not want a penniless daughter-in-law !”

“Poor Miss Lester ! I am afraid she has a trying time to pass through. However little she may care for these people, it will surely be a bitter mortification to be rejected by them the instant she ceases to be heiress of Morfa.”

“Shafto will not reject her on that account. I am only afraid of his spoiling all by insisting too earnestly on keeping his promise to her. He will do it all the more fiercely because he does not love her. What a difficult part Lady Helen will have to play between them ! I wonder if she will have sense and courage to tell the exact truth to each, after all her previous misrepresentations, and make them see how little love there has ever been in their engagement. It is the only way, but I fear it is too straightforward for her to take.”

“She will have plenty of time to consider her plans. The marriage must be put off now for six months at least, on account of Mr. Lester's death, and before those six months are over they will surely have discovered each other's real wishes.”

“I hope so. When that engagement is once broken, there will be no more mortification for Rosamond.”

“How so ? I should fear that many more mortifications must follow such a sudden fall from great wealth to poverty.”

“I must not tell other people's secrets, but do you remember Tennyson's story of Lady Clare ? I shall make Hilary read it after tea. I wish the time were come for his saying the two last lines in earnest—

“For we will wed to-morrow morn,
And you shall still be Lady Clare.”

“It is a long way off yet, I can tell you. You speak as if titles could be proved and estates change hands in a night. There is a great deal of work to be done, and some anxiety to bear. One never knows how things will go.”

“What are you going to do first ?”

“Nothing just at present. I shall wait till I return to London, learn who are Rosamond's guardians, and speak first to them. Of course they will make a hard fight to keep the estate for her, and they command money to fight with, and we have none.”

"But we have right on our side, and you to make the right clear. Oh, you will not succeed in making me anxious."

"No; I shall be the only anxious person—I shall have all the work to do. You good people will trust blindly to me, and not trouble yourselves in the least."

"Well, you have two or three days' respite while you stay here; let us make the most of them."

I was glad at first to be able to put aside for a time the thought of coming change; but a very few days after Mr. Lester's funeral was over, I began to wish that some hint of George's discovery might find its way to Lady Helen's ears. The manner in which she monopolized Rosamond, and made herself mistress of Morfa, rather alarmed me. She believed herself to have already clutched the prize she had so long coveted, and she could not quite conceal her triumph. I don't think she was uneasy at the postponement of the marriage. She had too much confidence in Rosamond's honour to fear that she would withdraw a promise once given. And perhaps, too, in the first moments of bereavement, Rosamond, feeling herself utterly alone in the world, did turn with a yearning for affection to those who were so soon to claim her as their own. Certainly during the few times when I saw Rosamond, Lady Helen, and Shafto together, their manner to each other troubled me. The compassionate sympathy with which Shafto regarded Rosamond in her grief might well be taken for love, and Lady Helen was charmingly, happily affectionate to them both. I could hardly keep myself from believing that she was the fond, devoted mother she appeared to be. Happiness did for the time, I suppose, make her amiable.

I did not absent myself from the Hall, as I had formerly done. I took every opportunity of being with Rosamond Lester, and used every affectionate wile I could think of to draw her once more under our influence. I had no scruple about doing this now; I wanted her to feel that she had some friends to whom she might turn when the storm burst over her.

My assiduity gained me one object on which my heart was set. When Lady Helen and Mr. Carr returned to London, I succeeded in persuading Rosamond to remain behind with Mrs. Western at Morfa. Lady Helen had planned that Rosamond was to live with her till her marriage, and she was

much disappointed and very angry when Rosamond roused herself sufficiently to have a wish that did not accord with her arrangements. It was not till the day for the journey was determined upon, that Rosamond found courage to declare her intention of staying at home. Till the very last moment, Lady Helen hoped to carry her off, out of the dangerous region of my influence, and I must confess I rather enjoyed timing my daily visit to Morfa so as to see her drive off discomfited and alone.

A week after, Lady Helen was no doubt very thankful to me for having relieved her of an embarrassing companion. The news that George Armstrong had brought forward a claim on my mother's behalf to the Morfa estate, must have come upon her like a thunder-clap. I never knew till long afterwards how she bore it. While the cause was pending, she wrote regularly to Rosamond, chatty pleasant letters, such as one acquaintance might write to another, full of public news and gossip about common friends; but not containing a word of allusion to any personal interest. There might as well have been no law-suit going on in which Rosamond's whole fortune was involved, no marriage in prospect between her and Shafto, for any mention Lady Helen made of either. Rosamond used to show these letters to me with a puzzled look. They amused me; they were so exactly what, under the circumstances, I should have expected Lady Helen to write.

As Lady Helen's letters grew colder, Mr. Carr's increased in warmth. Sometimes Rosamond would read to me a sentence or two from one of them. They contained no exaggerated expressions of affection, no words which I could say to myself must be untrue. He was earnest only in insisting that the change of Rosamond's circumstances must not and should not affect the promise that had passed between them. To me, the reiterated words, dwelling always on that one point, were those of a man who knew himself to be insisting on his own doom, and was yet determined to leave no word unsaid that could make it more certain. His pleadings were hearty enough; they were respectful, sympathizing, even tender sometimes; but I felt that they were not those which a lover would have used to urge such a suit.

One day, about a week after the news that we had gained our cause came down to Morfa, Rosamond asked me in direct

words, "Do you think he loves me?" I answered by giving her an account of Nesta's acquaintance with Mr. Carr, from the first day of his meeting her at Broadlands to their final parting. I told her just the facts, and let her judge of them for herself. It grieved me to see how much she was surprised and pained by my history. Believing she had no other firm friend in the world, she had begun to trust to Mr. Carr, and to cling to the thought of his affection for her. It wounded her deeply to learn that he had wooed her from pique and disappointment, not even from kindness. Life seemed very hard to her just then. She said she had no friend anywhere whom she could trust; no one, it seemed, had ever really loved her or dealt openly with her. She was disposed at first to be angry with me for having concealed from her Mr. Carr's conduct to Nesta. She complained that we had stood by—we who thought ourselves so open and true—and let her be deceived. I was sorry for all this pain, but I knew I had only given a bitter medicine, for which she would thank me by-and-by. She wrote to Mr. Carr after seeing me, and the next day he came down to Morfa. I believe he honestly did all he could to persuade her to keep to her engagement, but she remained firm in her determination to end it. I did not see him while he stayed at Morfa, nor her after they had parted. I was surprised by receiving a farewell letter from her, two days after Mr. Carr's return to London. In it she told me that she and Mrs. Western had resolved to leave Morfa as speedily and quietly as possible. They had arranged to start the next morning for Edinburgh, where they expected to stay some months with a sister of Mrs. Western's, who had kindly invited them to make her house their home, till some plan for Rosamond's future life could be determined upon. At the conclusion of the letter Rosamond hoped we should not be hurt at her leaving without seeing us. She avoided us from no feeling of ill-will, but because she shrunk from parting scenes. She hoped we should be happier at Morfa than she had been, and she begged us not to be uneasy about her. She was glad to be free, and to see a straightforward, if cloudy life, before her. She and Mr. Carr had parted friends, and some day she hoped to speak a word for him to Nesta.

I showed this letter to Hilary, and it was all I could do to dissuade him from following her at once to Edinburgh. It

was only by assuring him continually that Rosamond was not a person to accept one lover the week after she had discarded another, that I could induce him to be patient for a little while. I wrote often to Rosamond, but did not receive answers to my letters. George corresponded with her guardians and with Mrs. Western, and every now and then there came a few lines from her, to acknowledge the considerate kindness which my father and mother showed in every arrangement where her interests were concerned.

She accepted the liberal provision which my father assigned to her from the estate, because she would not pain him by refusing it; but I gathered from the words of her letter, that it would better have suited her present mood if she had been thrown entirely upon her own resources, and had to do battle against the world unaided. She could not bear to be pitied, and just then she would receive every kindness as a mark of pity instead of love.

I could not make Hilary understand how unfavourable this state of mind was to his wishes. He would go to Edinburgh before I gave him leave, and he came back crosser and more unhappy than he had ever been in his life. It was long before I could get the particulars of his visit from him, or learn more than that he had been decidedly and angrily refused. When I did hear all that he had said, and all Rosamond had answered, I felt less hopeless than he insisted on being. I saw exactly how he had ruined his own cause. In telling Rosamond of his love, he had also let her know that he would never have asked her to be his wife if she had continued heiress of Morfa; and she had chosen to believe that his asking her now, in her fallen fortunes, was a fresh instance of the insulting pity she was so anxious to put from her.

I do not believe the tangle would ever have been put right if my father had not suddenly taken into his head to start off with my mother on a visit to his old friend Dr. Allison. He did not say a word about seeing Rosamond, but he had not been a day in Edinburgh before he sought her out; and, after that, my mother's letters never failed to contain some mention of her. She and my father had gone out to walk—or they had been sitting for a whole hour talking in Dr. Allison's garden—or Rosamond was reading Dante to him. She had such a pretty accent, and read Italian better, our father said, than I did.

I was not jealous, but I was much amused. Certainly, in old times, the idea of our father concerning himself to bring two lovers to a right understanding, would have appeared to us very incongruous.

They stayed a month with Dr. Allison, and then my father wrote to Hilary to come and bring them home again. He went. Nesta and I had to keep house at Morfa alone for a fortnight, and when they came back it was a radiantly happy party we had to receive : Hilary was engaged to Rosamond, and the marriage was fixed for the autumn. I did not see it, nor the happy return to Morfa Mawr of its old mistress under a new name. My own day had come before that—a sunny, showery July day, which George said had just the mixture of cloud and shine which we might reasonably expect in our lives. We have had fewer showers, however, so far, than the day had.

When Hilary was married I was abroad with George, making the most of his autumn holiday, for his first tour in Switzerland.

Hindrances of one kind and another prevented our going down to Morfa for nearly a year after we were married, so that the new ways of living, the new occupations and relationships, had become old to every other member of the family before I saw much of them.

The Great House never looked quite home-like to me, and I don't believe it ever did to my father and mother. They tried it for a year, but my mother never left off lamenting the old manor-house, which Mr. Lester had wickedly pulled down, and my father could not find anywhere a den small enough for him to walk up and down in. Also, my mother's notions of housekeeping and Rosamond's did not quite coincide. My mother was afraid of the Morfa Mawr servants, and had no peace in her life because of their extravagant ways ; whereas Rosamond, in spite of past tirades against luxury, proved to have a lurking love of magnificence in her, which disposed her to believe that the credit of Hilary's family was concerned in maintaining the state of the Great House unimpaired. When they had lived together for a year, it was decided that my father and mother should give up Morfa Mawr to Hilary and Rosamond and return to Morfa Bach, which Hilary had improved into a very pretty country-house, not so unlike the old manor but that my mother could be happy in it. The

octagon room was lined from ceiling to floor with book-shelves, and my father again paced up and down between the windows, and he and my mother wandered about the Morfa Bach woods as happily and unconstrainedly as they had done before our change of fortune.

But though my father abandoned Morfa Mawr, he by no means abdicated to Hilary his position of master of the Morfa estate. Power of any kind came to my father accompanied with too deep a sense of responsibility for him to put it aside. He was as much the head of his tenants and work-people as he had been of the school and of his family, and he knew them all in the same marvellous way in which he had known us. Hilary used to say that my father was not quite at ease, if there was an old woman on the estate who complained that her cottage chimney smoked, till he had thought of some way of curing it; and as he listened to every complaint, and never would believe but that every ill might be remedied, the people of Morfa had busy times under my father's rule. With Nesta, or Rosamond, or my mother, he visited, at regular intervals, every farm-house, shepherd's cottage, or miner's hut that came within his jurisdiction, and knew the people who lived in them, and was made the confidant of all their joys and cares.

They came to have a superstitious feeling about the blind gentleman's knowledge of them. They could not believe that it came to him in an ordinary way, and many, of the most ignorant among them, were first awakened to a sense of responsibility by a conviction that they were somehow or other never out of the ken of those sightless eyes, which awed them by their fixed, mild gaze; while my father's words impressed them with the belief that he understood better than they did themselves what was passing in their minds.

I think my father's life was far more altered by our change of fortune than was our mother's. In reality it made very little difference to her; her cares, her fears, her occupations, her pleasures, were neither increased nor diminished by the attainment of what she had perhaps often coveted. My father would, in thought, have shrunk from the position in which he was now placed, and yet it fitted him, and called out powers in him which had never yet been fully exercised. He had more care, but his life was fuller, richer than it had been before.

Nesta divided her time pretty equally between the two Morfas. She and Rosamond were fast friends. Rosamond kept up an occasional correspondence with the Carrs, and I fancy that she and Nesta had a good deal of talk over the letters that came and went. Rosamond was always more of an advocate for Mr. Carr than I could prevail on myself to be. She had known him under circumstances favourable for bringing out the good in his character; she always felt kindly towards him, and, now that she was quite happy herself, generously excused his conduct to her. For that, Nesta loved her, and clung to her. I had had one letter from Mr. Carr to congratulate me on my marriage. In it, he said that he refrained from sending any message to Nesta because he could not expect her to forgive him, or trust him again, without a long probation. If he had been able to resign Rosamond while she was still heiress of Morfa, he should at least have given us a proof of his sincerity: as it was, he stood in the position of one who had been rejected, and he had no right to hope that Nesta would listen to him till time had proved the reality of his attachment. I sent a kind answer to this letter, and then our correspondence ceased, and I heard of him and of Lady Helen only now and then from Rosamond. They lived for some years abroad. Lady Helen had a very serious illness one winter, and after that she remained for some years in very feeble health. Her son resided with her in a retired village in the south of Italy, where Lady Helen spent her time watching her own health, and her son studied and wrote. Every now and then a book of his found its way to Morfa. The first that came remained for a week uncut on the drawing-room table; no one looking at it but Nesta, who had not courage to take possession of it and carry it to her own room, and who only ventured to peep between the pages when no one was near. At last it chanced that Rosamond's eye fell upon a passage which she thought would please my father. She put the volume in her pocket, carried it down to Morfa Bach, and read portions of it aloud one evening, without telling my father who was the author. His determination not to admire modern poetry kept him silent for a long time, and prompted him to find fault whenever he could. This was an odd expression, and that simile was surely strained. But the reader was kept to her work. My father would have one stanza and then another read

again. At last he was fairly conquered, and got up and walked rapidly up and down the room—the greatest tribute my father ever paid to the excellence of a book. When Rosamond described to me how Nesta looked during this walk, I wished I had been there to see. Charlie's old hero-worship of Mr. Carr returned stronger than ever; and after that day the arrival of a book of his was the greatest of events at Morfa. Nesta had some difficulty in establishing her right to these books, though they were always very distinctly sent to her; and if she had confessed the thought of her heart, she would have said that she had another right, that of understanding some passages in them better than any one else could.

It was not till I had been married several years that I saw Shafto Carr again. He walked quietly into my sitting-room one very busy morning, when some domestic commotion was going on, and my little people were not behaving themselves in as orderly a manner as usual. He volunteered to stay and help me through the morning lessons, and made himself so much at home in my house that, during the few weeks he stayed in London, he was seldom to be found anywhere else. We got a good deal of envy from our acquaintance on account of our monopoly of a person whom every one was wanting to see; and we could not confess that it was not entirely esteem and affection for us that made him prefer spending his mornings in play with my little girls, and his evenings in quiet talk with George, to frequenting the society of those who were vying with each other how to make much of him. We grew very fond of him while he stayed with us. When we were alone we used to say to each other how much we thought him improved, and when next we were in his company we were almost ashamed of having used a word which sounded as if we thought ourselves his superiors. Yet he had improved, and in a way of which we were capable of judging. He had grown up since we last saw him; he had left off playing with serious things, and was now in earnest in his search for truth. He was one to be always seeking. The change was, that he now sought reverently and earnestly, in the childlike, humble spirit that alone can find. In the light that had come to him, the faults that had deformed his character—the discontent, the weariness, the morbid self-inspection—had vanished away. I used to tell him that,

though he was more of a man, he was also more of a child than he had been eight years before. I should not have been afraid of setting him and my father to talk on any subject now. There would be no occasion now to watch their words tremblingly.

He was detained in London by business for some time. As soon as he was free, he went down to Morfa, and spent the rest of the summer between the three houses (for Charlie had a church and parsonage at Tan-y-Coed by that time). He was very welcome at each of the three; but it was not till late in the autumn that he found courage to ask Nesta to renew her old promise to him. I believe Lady Helen was the person who rejoiced most thoroughly on hearing of their engagement. We all dreaded too much the prospect of losing Nesta to do more than consent uncomplainingly. Lady Helen made up for past coldness by overwhelming cordiality now. She had long been very lonely, very wretched; she had become very helpless, and she certainly showed great knowledge of character when she threw herself upon Nesta's sympathy, and claimed her love and duty as unreservedly as if she had never injured her.

Nor do I think that she found the kindnesses, with which Nesta soothed the last years of her life, "coals of fire." She only wondered that some people should be so different from others, and congratulated herself that, after all, things had turned out better for her than at one time she had expected. She seemed to think there was a virtuous resignation in her saying this, as if she paid a compliment to Providence by acknowledging that, after all, His plans had proved better than her own. It was strange, I used to observe to George sometimes, that a person of so much intellect as Lady Helen should be able to look at the events of life in such a poor, personal spirit only. He was not surprised. She had all her life, he said, been planning and scheming for herself, and intellect and heart had narrowed, till the interests of self were alone visible, and the universe seemed to turn round that poor centre. She could only gain from Nesta the good of being more at ease when near her. She could not be raised by her example to any higher standing-ground—so I think, at least; but Nesta will not believe but that some of the love and gratitude which Lady Helen professes to feel, is disinterested and genuine. What a contrast there is between

my mother and Lady Helen in their old age!—the one becoming yearly more burdened with petty cares, more anxious about small comforts and pleasures, less able to abstract her thoughts a moment from her own infirmities and losses; the other growing always tenderer, larger-hearted, free from self, as the time for losing self altogether draws near, wiser with the sublime heart-wisdom which comes of loving much. Yet Lady Helen, not without reason, considered our mother a childish, weak character, no fit companion for herself, when they began life together.

I have said that I never found Morfa Mawr as home-like as either of my old homes, and yet, now I think of the aspect it has worn during one or two of our late autumn visits, I am disposed to retract the saying. It is not at all too large for the number of children it has to take in at our great family gatherings, and when Nesta and I, with our childrep, are visiting there, my father and mother leave Morfa Bach to Mrs. Morgan, and contrive to reconcile themselves to the Great House. I do not think it casts a shadow over any one now. I amuse myself when we are all together by observing how anxious we are, each of us, to believe our children free from the faults through which we have suffered, and endowed with the perfections which we know are wanting in ourselves. I am proud when my mother praises my little daughters' sewing, and declares that they are all more notable than their mother was at the same age. Shafto and Nesta delude themselves with the idea that their only son is as hardy and adventurous as Hilary's boys, and do not like to hear of his having kept the whole party of children idle an entire morning on the beach, listening breathlessly to a fairy tale, when they were supposed to be out boating. Hilary and Rosamond, on the other hand, are somewhat disappointed that, among all their children, only one shows any disposition to inherit our father's love of books. They never over-valued intellect in grown-up people, but on this one clever but sickly child they lavish so much pride and love, that we sensible bystanders tremble to see it. "My father over again," Hilary says, triumphantly, whenever he notices that the delicate little fellow, unable to cope with his strong, rough brothers and sisters, has crept away to read in peace in some sunny nook of the garden.

We used at one time to fear that Rosamond and Hilary

were growing a little over-full of the cares and business of life, becoming so cumbered with "many things," that they were in danger of losing the reality of happiness in the parade of outward circumstance which great wealth brings. It is not so now. The constant trembling fear, with which they watch over this child's frail life, seems to have made more worldly interests sink again into their due proportions. Charlie has the new church, built and endowed by my father for the miners at Tan-y-Coed. The old farm-house has been turned into a perfect parsonage. He and my father work very happily together among his parishioners, though there are points of Church-discipline on which they are not agreed. Charlie is perhaps a little opinionative still, and his old hatred of authority has changed into a very high opinion of priestly dignity, and an excessive straitness about rules and observances which my father thinks somewhat unwise. We have very hot arguments when George and Shafto, Charlie, my father and I, fall into discourse together over a new book, or a sermon, on Sunday evenings. I sometimes think that it is because Shafto has courage to make us go deeper, and take wider views of the subject in discussion than we should do without his leading, that these talks most usually end by our finding, that though we have none of us conceded anything, we are nearer in thought than we believed ourselves to be when the argument began.

My father usually leaves the church-services to Charlie, having a needless distrust of his own little-exercised powers of preaching; but sometimes he gives us a sermon, and if it is known beforehand, the villagers come for miles round to the little Tan-y-Coed church to hear the blind gentleman preach. The last time I heard him was one September afternoon, after the harvest-thanksgiving service, and the congregation was so large that we had to abandon all pretence of gathering inside the building, and adjourn to the churchyard on the sloping hill-side. The door of the church was open, and Charlie read the service from the desk duly, his fine voice being clearly audible outside; but my father came and stood to preach by the one mound that had yet broken the smooth green surface, destined in a few years to be furrowed with graves. It was a very still day, and we could hear, far below us, the high tide lapping against the steep sides of Tan-y-Coed Head. Now and then a sea-gull's or cormorant's cry rose

shrill ; now and then the distant bleating of sheep from the opposite side of the hill mixed pleasantly with the sea music.

My father stood silent for a moment or two after Charlie had led him to his place, listening to these sounds. Then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he gave out his text. I knew it was not the one he had intended to speak about. "The earth is the Lord's," he said, in a tone of solemn triumph and satisfaction. "The earth is the Lord's !" He dwelt on the words ; they were to him, a song of joy, which he could not repeat too often on this perfect day, when the wealth of the year had been safely gathered, and the labours of the year brought to a successful close. He warned the people against fancying that any part of this earth was more one person's than another's ; and he besought them never to forget, in their transactions with him, and with each other, that the fertile fields and rich valleys and sheltering hills of Morfa were a Divine possession, which it was sacrilege for any one human owner to arrogate to himself.

A share of its treasures the true Owner would give to each, in such proportion as pleased Him. Of its best enjoyments we could not mete out each other's shares. Then he referred to his own blindness, and made the people understand how Morfa belonged to every one of them who had eyes to see its beauty, more than to him. Yet he did not complain of his privation, for he told them there was an inward accordance with the mind of the Creator which brought the tranquillity and joy of nature more intimately into the soul than mere outward vision could do. To be at one in will with the Giver was truly to possess all things. Rich or poor, wise or simple, the earth was theirs—all things were theirs, with whom was the secret of the Lord !

THE END.



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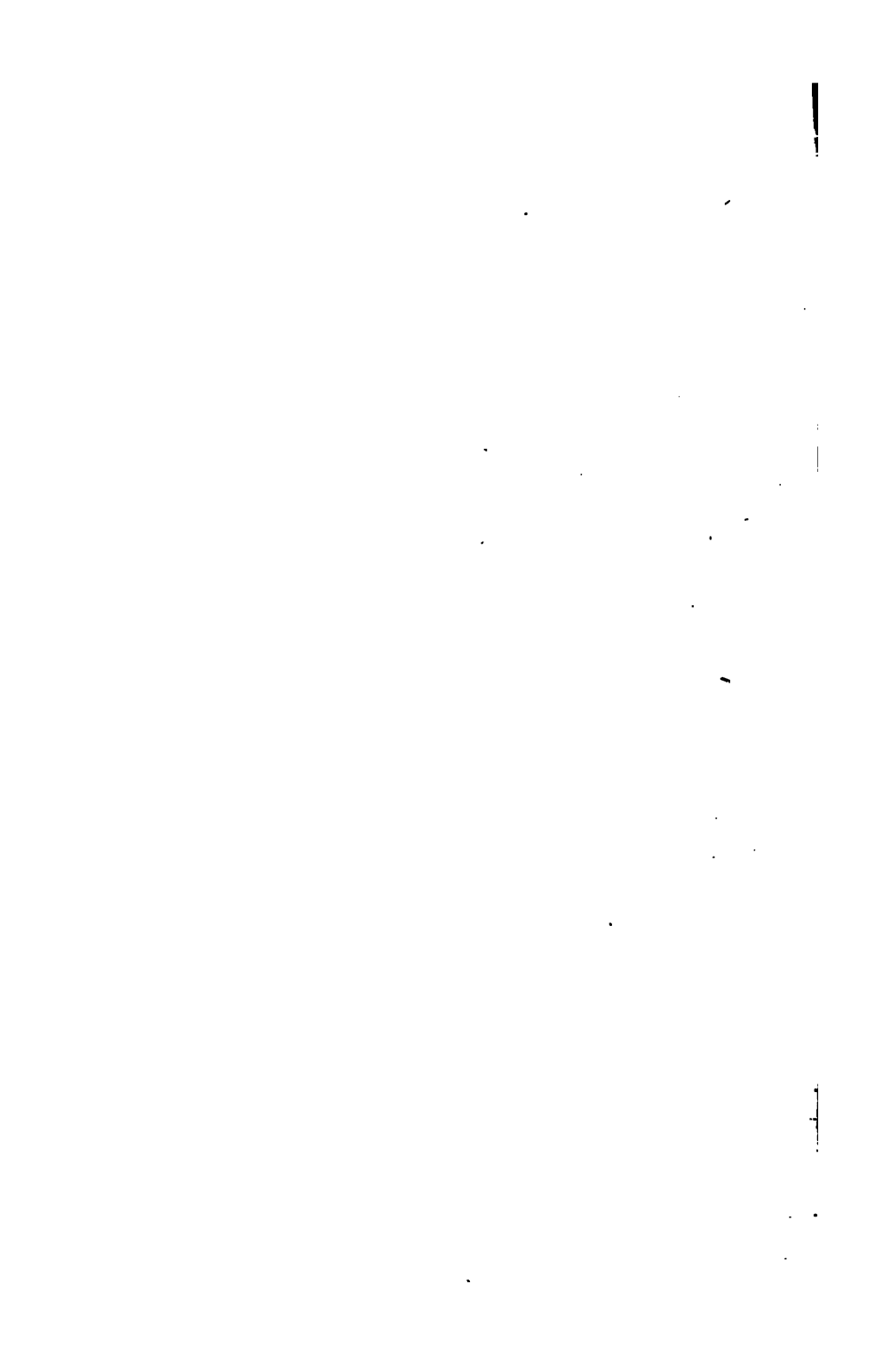
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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles.





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